ARDEN LONG



My

DARK JOCK

THE COMPLETE SERIES

MY DARK JOCK: THE FULL SERIES

Arden Long

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Book Cover by Arden Long

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About The Author

To Zoi,
for all the dodgy laughs, cheer leading,
and letting me use you like a human dictionary.

And to everyone out there who
gets their freak on without shame.

Content and Trigger Warnings

BDSM including:
Impact play
Bondage
Orgasm denial
Chastity cage left on for an extended time
Butt plug left inside for an extended time
Vibrator used for an extended time
Gags
Blindfolds
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Choking
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Public edging
Humiliation
Stretching
Public sex

BDSM malpractice; lack of aftercare (In part 1. Improves from part 2)

Toxic relationship between MCs (again this improves)

Mild violence

Past child abuse (off page, described by victim)

Kink shaming (not by MCs)

Alcohol consumption

Vomiting

TURNED BY MY TEAMMATE

PROLOGUE

-Malcolm-

I PUSH myself hard. The cold night air bites at my bare chest, but my skin burns hot as a fever. Sweat shears off my chin, sticks my hair to my face, and makes my straining limbs slick. My muscles bunch and shift as my long legs consume the ground. My breath rips in and out of me in ragged bursts.

But it isn't enough. These midnight runs are getting less and less effective. The churning inside me won't clear, no matter how many laps I do, no matter how relentlessly I push myself. The buzz of adrenaline just isn't enough anymore.

The small voice at the back of my head tells me what I already know: Only one thing will do.

I clench my jaw, but as my feet pound the turf, my rock-hard discipline starts to crack as the need becomes overbearing, the churning in my head like a hurricane.

"Fuck," I spit in frustration.

I hate giving in, it feels like losing a battle to myself. But I already know I'm going to do it, and I growl as I stagger to a stop and drop heavily to my knees. As I gulp in great ragged lungfuls of air, with my blood fizzing through me, I tear my loose shorts down around my aching thighs and take my heavy dick in my hand.

It's already half-hard and filling out fast. I groan, close my eyes, and think about the one person that I told myself I wouldn't think about; his dirty blond hair, his lean body, that ridiculously bright smile, and his puppy dog eyes. North Nolan. The popular, cheerful, and very straight, star player of our team. Golden boy of the college.

He swims into my vision, and my mind finally clears, taken up entirely by thoughts of him, my guilty pleasure. My dick is still filling as I jerk it furiously, bracing myself with one fist on the ground.

The things I would do to him. I'd make that dopey grin twist into a cry of agonizing pleasure. I'd make his bright blue eyes roll back in his head. I'd coat that tan skin in a slick layer of sweat and cum, until it was pink and flushed.

These thoughts are forbidden; I'm not allowed to dream about things I'll never have, I don't have time for flights of fancy—they are for weak-minded people—and he is most definitely off-limits to someone like me. Only last week I saw him ducking into the closet with Becki, in her push-up bra and short skirt. It had taken me far too long to cool down from a thundercloud that I didn't want to admit was caused by jealousy. I don't need that mess in my life. If he knew I thought about him like this, his pretty head would probably explode.

I curl over myself, eyes screwed shut, furious grunts falling from my mouth. The tension inside me twists tighter and tighter.

"Ngh, fuck." My head flops down, sweaty hair clinging to my forehead. I'm almost there—

Thud.

My head snaps up as the noise echoes around the wide-open space of the sports field, jerking me out of my fantasy. What was that? I pant as I search the stands, my heart hammering in my ears, but I don't see anyone in the deep shadows.

"Is someone there?" I bark, and my empty words echo back to me.

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I catch the slightest glint of light, a flash of the moon reflecting off something shiny, and then there's the pounding of feet on the bleachers, receding into the night. Someone saw me.

I bare my teeth.

"Shit."

1

-North-

I DON'T usually come to the bleachers at night, but I have a big football game coming up and it's got me too wired to sleep. I'm the football team's star player—which is great, don't get me wrong—but it's a lot of pressure sometimes. It's weighing on me extra heavily tonight, and I came here thinking maybe if I get some extra drills in, get my body pumping, then I'll be able to sleep.

The rows of benches, which are usually lit up by the flood lights, are dark and shadowy, and it's kinda eerie—prime slasher movie setting. Although I'm pretty sure you only get murdered if you're doing sexy shit, and drills are far from sexy. So I should be fine.

I dump my bag down on a bench and fish a beaten-up packet of cigarettes out of my pocket, and a lighter. I suck the smoke into my lungs and sigh it out slowly through my nose in a wispy cloud.

It feels good and bad at the same time, my secret vice. Makes me feel like a rebellious bad boy for once. No one knows I smoke, and I'm trying to quit because I know it's not good for my athletic prospects, but my impulse control isn't great at the best of times, and I'm feeling jangly tonight.

With the shameful cigarette perched between my lips, I have my jacket half off when I notice a dark duffel bag on the bench next to mine. I didn't spot it in the shadows. It's hanging open, but I can't see what's inside from this angle. Maybe someone forgot it at practice earlier. I vaguely recognize it, but I can't remember—

The *thud thud thud* of feet on compacted ground rises up from below and I look around quickly. I'm not alone. The cigarette is out of my mouth and under my shoe before I even register it's happened.

Through the darkness I can just make out a dark figure at the far end of the field. They're moving fast and getting closer. I squint. It must be one of the guys. Josh? But he's not that fast. Maybe Randy?

I'm about to call out to them when the moon comes out from behind a wisp of cloud and the runner comes into focus. Tall and pale, wearing only loose shorts that cling to his hips, dark hair plastered to his neck with sweat, broad shoulders pumping as he runs.

Shit. Him.

I duck back slightly.

Malcolm Blackwood has always hated me, and I don't know why. And, as much as I wish it didn't, it bothers the hell out of me. I'm not used to being disliked. Everyone loves me, because, well, I'm lovable as hell. I'm probably in the running for the most popular guy in Langley College, all I have to do is smile at someone, give them a flash of the pearly whites, and we're lifelong friends. Hell, I've got women practically lining for a chance to get with me. An opportunity I'm certain I'd make the most of if I had the time or energy. As it is, I've never had a particularly high sex drive.

But Malcolm Blackwood is different. No matter how brightly I smile at him, or how much I compliment his game, he just goes quiet and looks at me with his cold, hard eyes like he despises the ground I walk on. He's barely spoken to me at all since I joined the team. And I have no idea what I've done to deserve it. So you could say he rubs me the wrong way.

To be honest, he scares me a little bit. He's so big and grumpy, and super intense, something about him just feels kinda—well, not really dangerous but . . . raw. I'm a confident guy, no one could argue with that, but he makes me nervous.

So, I don't speak up. Just seeing him has worn off the slight buzz of the nicotine. Forget about drills, I'll go back to my dorm and do pushups until I pass out.

But as I turn away, for some unknown reason, I hesitate. There's something mesmerizing about him. His speed is impressive, but it's more than that. I've never seen him with his top off before, which is weird now that I think about it. I've seen everyone else on the team practically bare butt naked in the showers, but he always hangs back until we've finished. As his path takes him past my hiding spot, the moonlight catches on his back. I stare. He's got a scar across his shoulders, stretching almost from one side to the other. The tight pink line stands out against his pale skin, shiny and reflective. How did he get it? It must have been something bad to leave a mark that big.

I'm staring now, unable to drag my eyes away from the way his body moves, the smooth slide of his muscles under sweat-slicked skin. His wide shoulders and long legs, the hard mounds of his abs.

He runs hard from one end of the field to the other, pushing himself until he is absolutely drenched in sweat, even in the cold air. I don't understand how he can keep going at this pace. Surely he has to stop soon—

He falls and my heart does a double tap as he lands on his hands and knees, breathing hard. I can't see his face well with his head bowed behind a curtain of damp hair, but from here he looks . . . upset. Maybe I should go down and give him a hand or something, see if he's hurt himself.

I'm about to step out of my shadowy hiding place when, in one sharp movement, he yanks at the loose waistband of his shorts. I stiffen and stop.

Before I can look away, his shorts are down around his knees, pooled on the ground, and my eyes bug. He's not wearing any underwear. His cock is huge; long and heavy, and half-hard in the moon light.

What the fuck? This is weird. This is so weird. I should stop looking. I should leave.

But I don't look away. I can't. I can't even blink. And as I watch he spits into his palm, grasps his now hard dick in his fist and starts to pump it, hunched over himself and groaning so loudly it reaches me all the way up here. The image is primal, almost violent. And fuck, I'm transfixed.

My whole body is frozen in place, so even if I wanted to look away, I can't. But . . . *I don't want to*.

I'm straight, always have been, but right now he looks like some kind of heathen sex god. To my shock, a hot flush comes over me, making my body tingle, and my own cock starts to swell.

What the fuck. *What the fuck.* This is wrong. This is so wrong. My head screams at me. What am I doing? I should leave.

Instead, my hand reaches into my pocket of it's own free will and brings out my phone. With no input from my brain, I raise it in front of me and press record. I know I shouldn't, I know it's massively creepy and invasive, but it's a need I don't understand that's so powerful, denying it isn't even an option. And like I said, shitty impulse control. But I'm not thinking about that. All I'm thinking about is the way his

body strains, his sweat-slicked skin, his face twisted in furious pleasure as he tips his head up.

I shift to get closer, and my knee knocks against something. I look down in time to see Malcolm's bag teeter on the edge of the bench.

"No," I hiss.

It tumbles, and I jerk in a belated attempt to catch it, but I'm too slow, and it hits the ground with a heavy *thud* that echoes across the stadium. The motion sends something shiny and metal clattering out onto the ground at my feet, and I blink at it. A pair of handcuffs. Why does he have handcuffs in his bag?

"Is someone there?"

On the field, Malcolm's head has snapped up, glistening with sweat, his eyes alert. He scans the bleachers, passing straight over me, and I duck backward and snatch my phone away.

I grab my bag and turn and run with my phone clenched in my hand. There's no point in trying to be sneaky now. As I run, my feet pound and echo around the bleachers, almost as loud as my heart.

2

-North-

MALCOLM HANDCUFFS me and pulls down my pants. Then his own. His cock is huge inside his boxers, straining against the material. I don't need to use my imagination to fill in the details, I've already seen the proof. He comes up behind me, grabs my hair, and puts his hand around my throat. He tears my boxers away and then plunges into me from behind. His strong body presses up against me as he fucks me hard.

What would that feel like? To be fucked by Malcolm Blackwood?

I lie in bed wide awake with my eyes shut, trying to trick myself into falling asleep, but my mind won't let me. I can't stop thinking about him. The image is on a constant replay in my head; Malcolm, hunched over, glistening, pleasuring himself—interspersed with intrusive thoughts of the things he could do to me with those handcuffs. And those hands. And that cock. They're intrusive thoughts, *not fantasies*, because I don't want him to do those things. Even though I've had a half-boner for hours, which, firstly is annoying as hell because it's stopping me from going to sleep, and secondly, doesn't even make sense, because I'm not gay.

I roll over, tangled in my bedsheets, and huff in frustration. My phone is sitting on the small table next to my bed. Even with my eyes tightly closed, I can feel its presence there, throbbing in my mind, like it's looking at me, wanting me to pick it up, to watch the video I took of him. But I'm NOT going to look at it. I have no idea what came over me to make me record Malcolm doing *that*, but I'm not going to look at it. I'm *NOT.*

Sighing, I rub my forehead, but the image of him doesn't fade. For some reason it's lodged in my head, like the one and only time I ever watched a scary movie at the cinema and had nightmares for a week.

It’s not even like I’ve never seen a dick before! I’ve seen plenty in the locker room showers, and it’s never really bothered me.

But I’ve never seen Malcolm’s . . . and those handcuffs . . . I chew on my cheek and stare at the inside of my eyelids. Why the hell did he have handcuffs in his bag? My heart pounds a little harder. It could be something perfectly harmless like part of a costume . . . or maybe some kind of prank. People do shit like that all of the time. It’s probably something like that. Something normal and not at all kinky.

But no matter how many times I think it, my mind won’t stop projecting a god damn porn film across the inside of my head. He chains me up and takes his sweet time with me as I writhe and beg for more, for him to . . . do things. Filthy things. Things I’ve never even thought about before.

A small noise slips out between my lips, and I snap my eyes open.

No, no, no, this is wrong. This is so wrong.

I rub my eyes. Morning light is sifting through the flimsy blind already, and I’ve barely slept at all. The whole point of going to the bleachers was so I could wear myself out and sleep, but all I’ve done is make it much, much worse.

I peek under the covers at my offending semi.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” I hiss at it. “He’s a dude. And he’s scary as shit.”

My dick presses against my boxers stubbornly; it’s not going anywhere. With a full-body sigh, I roll out of bed, giving up on trying to sleep. I have a big game coming up, and an array of tests and classes I need to pass, and my boner isn’t helping my state of mind. I check the time, it’s still hours before I need to get moving.

In these circumstances there’s only one thing I can do to clear my head.

***

Warm water runs over my body. It feels good, especially on my stubbornly half-hard dick, and I allow my hand to wander down to it slowly, like I want to catch it by surprise. I can’t believe it’s come to this, jerking off in the shower. I don’t know where this boner came from, but I’m getting rid of it. As I take hold of it, I bite my lip at the aching pleasure that seeps through me, and I haven’t even started yet. The image of Malcolm swims into my mind.

“No,” I murmur. “Think about Becki.”

With some effort, I shift my thoughts and picture her, settling on the time she took me into the equipment closet and let me see her boobs after I scored the winning touchdown. I was too freaked out by my inexperience to go any further with her, but it was hot anyway, and I’d played it off like I was playing hard to get. Her boobs were great though—round and soft—and I hold the image there as I stroke my dick.

It starts to soften, and I pump harder, gritting my teeth. I lean my forearm against the tiled shower wall and press my head against it.

“Shit. Come on. Becki’s nice.”

My cock doesn’t listen to me. Shit, I need to get rid of this horniness if I want to concentrate in any way today, and I’m already falling behind in my classes. But my dick seems to only want one thing.

Fine.

I heave a sigh and begrudgingly allow my mind to wander back to Malcolm. Maybe I just need to do this to get it out of my head. One and done. And then I can get on with my life.

“But only this one time, ok?”

I close my eyes and let myself think about him. About the handcuffs. About him using the handcuffs on me. My treacherous dick is instantly rock hard again, and I drag my hand along its length and shudder.

It doesn’t mean anything, I tell myself.

Water runs down my face as I turn it up into the stream, my mouth hanging open. My mind reels at the images being conjured as I jerk myself, and before I’m even properly started, my hips buck, mindlessly fucking into my hand, and then I’m coming violently. Taken by surprise, I brace myself against the wall as my body shudders and I spurt my load in surges over my fist before the hot water washes it away. My orgasm is mind-blowing in its intensity, and I have to remember how to breathe until the waves of pleasure start to diminish.

When I’m done I slump against the wall and gasp. What the hell? That’s the fastest I’ve ever come in my life. I think it’s the fastest anyone’s ever come. I sweep my dripping hair out of my face and look down at my dick, still squeezed tightly in my hand, and try not to analyze it. At least my mind is clear now; Malcolm has been jerked out of there, and I can get back to living my life like normal.

One and done.

***

The joke's on me, because my life does not, in fact, go back to normal. After my morning shower activities, I manage to keep a clear head for about thirty glorious minutes before the images of him come creeping back in again like a bad case of gas brought on by last night's questionable burrito. They haunt me all day. There's nothing more distracting during a slow bio class than a raging boner and a fantasy of my teammate doing unspeakable things to me. I shift so much the professor asks if I need to use the bathroom.

My phone is zipped safely in the pocket of my backpack all day, and I don't dare look at it, even to check the time. Maybe if I delete the video I can stop thinking about it. But I'm worried if I try to, I'll just watch it instead, and I know myself well enough not to risk it.

Now classes are done and it's time for practice, and I'm almost frantic with arousal and the dread of seeing him again. The first thing I do when I get into the locker room is check for the big dark shape of Malcolm. He's almost impossible to miss in a crowd, with how tall and broad he is, like a dark cloud hovering over everything.

His locker is empty and I breathe a sigh of relief and go to grab my bag. If I get dressed quickly I can get out before he arrives and not have to deal with him and this pounding in my chest every time I think about what I did.

I pull my shirt off, throw it into my locker, and grab my gear and cleats. Then I turn and slam full body into the rock-hard chest of someone behind me, sending me rebounding back against the locker with a clang.

"Shit, sorry—"

My words choke off as I look up into the dark eyes of Malcolm, inches away from me. He's wearing nothing but a skintight tank and a pair of black sweatpants that hang off his hips, displaying his muscled torso and wide shoulders. The harsh florescent lights wash out his skin even more than it already is, making him look like some kind of ominous apparition towering over me, even though I know logically he's only a few inches taller.

My gear falls from my arms and scatters at our feet. Those penetrating eyes narrow at me and I'm terrified that he can see straight into my head to the shame boiling there. Does he somehow know I saw

him last night? That I recorded him? That I jerked off to him? He looks pissed, but that's no clue because he always looks pissed when he sees me.

Heat flares across my face as, inevitably, the memory of him on the field, and all of the dirty fantasies I've had since, flood my brain, and I know from experience that I'm blushing bright red.

I need to say something, but my mind is entirely taken up with the horrifically shameful images of the man in front of me doing unspeakably arousing things.

"Oh . . . Ma—Hi. Malcolm. Hi . . . I er . . ."

Shut up, shut up, I scream internally.

His face is unreadable, cold and hard like it always is, and I concentrate on not looking at his chest and the mounds of muscle there, or at his groin, where his pants conceal what I now know is a huge—

Fuck! Before I can drag my mind away, my dick, which has been semi-hard all day, starts to fill. I'm wearing loose pants and there's no way he won't see my growing erection if he looks down slightly.

"I-er . . . shit," I stammer.

I'm sweating. I have to get out of here. Without another word, I abandon my stuff on the floor at his feet, along with my dignity, clutch my backpack over my groin, sidestep around him, and run. A single look back over my shoulder confirms my fears; he's still standing there, watching me, brow creased, eyes narrow and suspicious. Then my view of him cuts off as I duck into the shower stalls. I lean back against the tiled wall and my heart hammers in my chest.

Shit, that could not have gone any worse. What the fuck is wrong with me? I couldn't have been more obvious. He definitely knows something is up, and now I'm sweaty and horny as fuck.

I inch my bag away from my groin and glance down. It's just as bad as I thought it'd be, my sweatpants are tented and it's painfully obvious.

A shout from the changing area makes me jump. "Come on guys, let's get a move on, those drills aren't going to run themselves," Coach calls, clapping his hands over the noise of chatter.

I can't go out like this. The most conspicuous hard-on in the universe is standing out like a flagpole between my legs, and I left all of my gear on the floor out there. I stay put, praying it'll magically go away.

The noises diminish as the others go out onto the field. I'm the star player, they're going to notice pretty quickly if I'm not out there. And I

can’t waltz out onto the field with this boner. Which leaves me one option.

I strain my ears, listening for any sign of life in the locker room, but my heart pounds so loudly that it’s hard to make out anything, and my need is pushing on me like a freight train.

The waistband of my pants twangs as I stuff my hand in, the contact shooting instant pleasure through me. Am I really going to do this? Here? But I need to take care of this monster in my pants and get my head in the game, or I’m gonna end up dry humping the first guy who tackles me in the wrong way. There’s no other way. At least that’s what my horny brain is telling me, and I’m not exactly in the position to argue.

I jerk my cock, wanting to get it over and done with quickly, and the pleasure makes my toes curl. But it’s not enough. Now, with my dick in my hand and the pleasure building inside me, what little self-control I’ve managed to hold on to all day shatters, and I tear my bag open and snatch my phone out, like a starving man seeing food for the first time in months. In an instant I have the video open, my finger hovering over the play button, but I hesitate. If I do this, what does it mean? Am I gay? Bi? Am I a sick freak who spies on people and jacks off?

But my body is shaking, and my dick is aching and leaking already, and I need it. I press play and the image on the screen jumps to life.

The image of Malcolm fills the screen, hunched over on the ground, hand furiously jerking his huge cock as the moonlight gleams on his sweaty skin. It’s like the hottest porn I’ve ever watched.

I jerk my cock in convulsive movements, gasping at how good it feels, my eyes glued to the screen as the sound of his grunts whisper out of the speakers. The video is only a few seconds long, but my chest is already hitching with pleasure when it ends and I hit replay instantly, turning the volume up to better hear the impossibly hot noises he’s making.

Fuck. I hunch over, already on the verge of coming, and grunt as I thrust into my fist erratically.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

I jump. The phone drops from my fingers and clatters across the floor, landing screen up. At the same time, I spin, dick in hand.

Malcolm Blackwood is standing in the entrance to the shower stalls, staring at me.

3

-North-

MALCOLM'S DARK eyes go first to my dick, swollen and leaking precum in my hand, and then to my phone on the floor where the video of him plays across the screen. The tinny sound of his grunts rises up between us. I'm completely frozen, all of my thoughts have skittered away to the dark corners of my mind. I don't breathe. My heart doesn't beat. I just stand there and watch him as he watches the video until it ends. Then there's silence. His face is cold and blank.

He crouches and reaches for my phone. It breaks me from whatever spell I'm under, and I drop my dick and lunge for it, as if I can stop him from seeing what's on it, as if he hasn't already, as if it isn't obvious what I was doing. But he's faster than me. I freeze as he touches the screen, and his grunts start again.

I'm so fucked. I'm so fucked. What is he going to do? Is he going to punch me? I deserve it. Or report me? I deserve that too.

Eventually, he speaks. "What the fuck is this?"

"I-I'm sorry. It's not . . . I didn't mean to . . ."

What?

I didn't mean to spy on you? I didn't mean to record it? I didn't mean to jerk off to it?

I want the tiles under my feet to open up and swallow me down into hell where I belong. That would be better than being here. I want the roof to fall in and crush me. I want to dissolve into atoms and float away through the air vents. But none of those things happen and I'm forced to keep on existing in this agonizing silence.

"You took a video of me?" Malcolm says.

What can I say? Of course I did, it's right there.

"No . . . I . . . someone sent it to me," I say.

"Who?"

I stammer for too long. "I-I don't know."

“You don’t know who sent it to you?”

“Er . . .”

He glances down at my crotch and I realize my dick is still hanging out of my pants, still just as hard. I scramble to tuck it away and he grabs my wrist.

“I didn’t tell you to stop,” he says.

“What?” I wheeze. My head spins. My skin tingles under his hand where he’s gripping my wrist hard enough for me to feel my pulse crashing against his fingers. Then he’s pushing me backward until my back hits the wall and I’m staring up at him with wide eyes.

“I didn’t tell you to put your dick away,” he growls.

At his tone, my cock stiffens even more. What the fuck is happening? He leans in until his nose is almost brushing against mine.

“Keep jerking yourself off,” he says in a voice so low and commanding that it sends a bolt of electricity straight to my cock and I gasp at how painfully aroused I am. I quiver inside, even as my hand inches back toward my dick and I take it in my clammy palm. He doesn’t take his eyes off mine while I start to work my full length again mechanically, twitching at each stroke.

He keeps me pressed against the wall as I work myself up into a frenzy, his eyes burning into me. A strange mix of shame and arousal spreads through me, bringing me to life in a way I’ve never felt before.

“Grab your balls,” he says.

I do, shuddering at the thrill it sends through me.

“Squeeze.”

My eyes are wide, my heart pounding, my breath coming in pants.

“Harder.” I do as he says. “Good.”

Fuck.

I’m inches away from coming when he growls, “Now, take a hold of my cock,” and I gasp and almost explode on the spot.

He wants me to touch his dick.

That huge cock I’ve been fantasizing about non-stop for over twelve hours straight. I fall over myself to oblige, and manage to fumble my fingers inside the waistband of his pants, jerking myself even harder. The tips of my fingers brush against his solid length, the skin hot and soft and I have to gulp the saliva suddenly pooling in my mouth.

Still staring into my eyes with a predatory fire, he makes the smallest noise in his throat as my hand closes around him.

This is the hottest thing that has ever happened to me. That has ever happened to anyone in the history of existence.

With one hand still pressed into my shoulder, keeping me pinned against the wall, he fishes in his pocket, and the next moment there's a phone in my face.

He pulls back slightly, angling it to get a full-body shot of me from above, dick in one hand, the other down his pants, and the shutter goes off. I know exactly how I must look; red, sweaty, eyes spaced out and heavy with arousal. He inspects the photo, then shoves his phone away. He's captured my shame, and I feel so pathetic, dirty, and vulnerable that it's almost too much, but I don't fucking stop. I moan as my orgasm approaches, hitching my hips into my own hand as I jerk us both furiously.

"Stop," he commands.

My head spins. "What—" I breathe.

"I told you to stop," he snarls. "Let go of your dick."

"But—"

I'm so close, I can't stop. Even if I wanted to my body wouldn't obey me, I'm past functional thought.

"I said *stop*," he growls, and his voice hits something deep inside me. My muscles react without any input from my brain, and I drop both of our dicks like they're burning hot. The twisting wild animal of my arousal thrashes in my belly, furious and starving. But, somehow, being overpowered by his will alone, being forced to stop, makes my blood fizz and my chest hitch.

There's a dark hunger shining in his eyes and I'm hanging on the edge of a cliff, waiting for what he's going to do next, or what he's going to make *me* do. Because right now, I'd do *anything*.

He watches me a moment longer, and then without another word, slips his dick away, spins on his heel, and walks off. It's like a punch to the gut.

"Wait!"

He pauses in the doorway, face entirely cool and controlled like absolutely nothing has happened, like I wasn't just jerking both our dicks while he held me against the wall. He is entirely unaffected. He shoots a smirk at me, and I realize with burning shame that this is the punishment I get for what I did. He's not going to let me finish. That might be what I deserve, but I'm so turned on I'm not thinking logically.

I open my mouth to swear, to beg, I don't know, but something else comes out instead.

"What are the handcuffs for?" The words fall out of me, pathetically desperate.

Malcolm gives me a slow blink, and for a moment I think he's going to tell me. But then he turns and walks out, leaving me wet and panting and starving for more.

"Fuck," I hiss.

***

If there were any kind of God above, he would conjure a thunderstorm so I don't have to go through practice with Malcolm. But a thunderstorm doesn't come, and I have to endure it.

I avoid his eyes for the entire practice, I don't even look within ten feet of him at any time.

I'm reeling with humiliation; I've just made a massive asshole of myself, Malcolm knows I'm a pervert, and now he has a photo of me. Karma is the worst bitch.

What is he going to do with the photo? Will he use it against me? I wouldn't be shocked, he's made it more than clear how much he hates my guts. I'm sweating so much my pads squelch when I get tackled.

Maybe he'll just use it for protection to make sure I don't share the video. But then why didn't he just make me delete it when he had me under his power? I shudder at the memory and trip over my own feet, faceplanting on the field.

The whole practice is a complete write-off. The number of times I fumble the ball is horrendous, and Coach cusses me out for the worst practice of my life and makes everyone do extra sprints because of me. That gets me plenty of glares and complaints from the guys. I'm relieved when it's finally over and I can go back to my dingy dorm and take care of myself.

I'm going to delete that video, jerk off to Becki's boobs, and forget all about fucking Malcolm Blackwood.

He's had his revenge. Now that I've thought it through, I don't think he'll share that photo if I don't share mine. Scary as he is, he doesn't seem the sort of person to do that. I skip the showers—for obvious reasons—and head straight to my locker, glancing over my shoulder. Malcolm's nowhere to be seen, thank god.

I strip off and get dressed in ten seconds flat before most of the other guys have even come back into the locker room. Even so, I have to hide my semi before I yank my pants up.

"Hey, North."

I jump and spin around, but it's only Josh, pulling his sweaty jersey off.

"What was going on with you today? You were all over the place. Everything ok, Bro?"

I have to make a conscious effort not to cover my crotch with my hands.

"Oh. Yeah, I'm fine. Just uh . . . got a lot on my mind, I guess. Classes are beating my ass, you know how it is."

He nods sympathetically. "Yeah man, Professor Blake's been riding me about that paper all week." He rolls his eyes. "You coming for a drink? Take a load off."

"Nah I can't," I say, desperately trying to think of an excuse that's not "I need to go beat off over Malcolm Blackwood before I pass out."

Josh doesn't give me a chance though. "Come on, you can spare an hour for me. Anyway, you owe me a beer. See you at Delaney's in ten, or I'll come find you and drag you out anyway." He grabs his towel and walks off toward the shower stalls before I can reply.

Shit. I snatch up my bag, sling it over my shoulder, and escape the locker room before Malcolm shows up.

Delaney's is a block away from campus, and the Irish style bar is already packed when I get there. I'm not in any danger of running into Malcolm though. I come here a lot with the boys, and he never shows up, even when we pluck up the courage to invite him.

I dump my bag on the last free table and order a round. I'll get mine in quick and then make my excuses to retreat to the privacy of my dorm room as early as possible.

The guys show up, and we chat and drink for a while. I sip my beer and try my best to join in the conversation, but there's only one thing on my mind right now, and it's not beer, or the last big football game. It's a pair of dark eyes and a hand gripping my wrist. The slide of flesh in my palm.

This isn't working. The beer is making me warm and the guys aren't distracting me from my rapidly re-growing semi like I'd hoped. I need to get out of here.

I chug the rest of my beer, and I'm about halfway through when my phone buzzes. It's an unknown number, and I frown at the message.

Unknown Number*: If you want to finish what we started and find out what the handcuffs are for, come to my place tomorrow evening.*

My heart hammers hard and fast. There's no name, but there doesn't have to be. There's only one person it can possibly be.

Underneath it there's an address, outside of the campus grounds, in the wealthy area on the far side of the college.

As I stare at the screen, another arrives.

Unknown Number*: I left you something. Check your bag.*

What? With my pulse roaring in my ears, I reach down, unzip my bag, and peer inside. A brown folded paper bag is tucked beside my dirty uniform. What the fuck?

Unknown Number*: Use it straight away and don't stop until I see you. Do not touch yourself.*

How the fuck did he put that in there? Without thinking, I pick up the paper bag. There's something heavy inside. I drop it quickly, as if it had tried to bite me, and my eyes go back to the messages. My head spins as I read them through five more times, trying to make sure I haven't somehow misunderstood.

"North. Hey, North. Did you hear me?" Josh calls at me from the other end of the table as the guys laugh at something I've missed.

I stand up abruptly, almost dropping my phone and clutching my bag to my chest. "I have to go to the restroom," I say urgently.

"Leave a window open after you, bro," Randy shouts, and the guys all laugh uproariously as I hurry through the crowded bar.

Inside the restroom, I lock myself in one of the stalls and read the messages again, then carefully take out the brown paper bag. Whatever's inside, it's heavy and solid. And Malcolm says he wants me to "use" it.

After a furtive glance over my shoulder, as if someone might have snuck into the stall with me, I open the bag and peer in.

Inside is a shiny metallic butt plug.

4

-North-

THIS IS crazy.

I'm not going to do it. No way. No fucking way.

He wants me to put in a butt plug and wear it all day.

No. I can't do that. I don't do that kind of thing. I play football and study, and flirt with girls. I'm straight and, to be honest, pretty vanilla. I don't shove butt plugs up my fucking ass.

I keep thinking this must be some kind of trick. He's messing with me. But then why would he give me his address?

Of all the things I expected to happen, this was the last. Ok, him joining me in the showers was the last, but this is a close second.

I'm so confused. I thought he hated me? So, was that stuff in the shower a test run? My head spins at the possibilities.

The offending plug sits on my bed as I pace the length of my dorm room, glaring at it.

No, this is crazy, and anyway, I don't have time for his games. I have studying to do, I have tests, I have classes I desperately need to catch up on, and I have to work on my game.

Mind made up, I grab the bag and march out of my dorm room into the shared social and kitchen area. I sling the bag into the trash and march straight back to my room. There, I'm too fucking busy for this shit. He can find someone else to mess with. I'm sure he'd have plenty of volunteers to play his twisted games. He can take his pick. I ignore the small prickling feeling that thought produces in my chest.

I sit down at the small desk next to my bed, get my bio book out, open it to the page I need, and start reading.

Who does he think he is anyway? Bossing me around, telling me what to do. Yeah, he's big and intimidating, with that air of effortless cool that you only get when you give zero fucks. So what if I can't stop thinking about him? It doesn't mean I have to do what he says.

I'm not even gay, or bi, or whatever. I'd know if I was, wouldn't I? I'm probably just bored and horny.

I get to the bottom of the page when I realize none of the text has registered, and I read it again, really trying to concentrate this time.

. . . His dark eyes in the shower cubicles. The way his face had darkened into something lustful and vindictive. The expanse of his solid chest. How he shoved me against the wall, forced me to keep going, his arm pinning me in place, overpowering me as if it were nothing.

My dick stirs and without thinking I slip my hand down into my pants and touch it lightly, then freeze, as a thought pops into my head unbidden.

He told me not to touch myself.

I whip my hand out of my pants, an ache shoots up from my groin, and my dick gets even harder. Why is his command so hot? And why do I want to obey him?

But it doesn't matter anyway, I can puzzle over it as much as I want, I'm not going to do it.

I stick the end of my pen into my mouth and try to clear my mind. After the fourth reread and still no retained information, I'm so horny I can hardly sit still.

Before I can stop myself, I'm shoving my chair back and running out of my room, down the hall, to the kitchen, and diving into the trashcan. The paper bag is on top of the trash, and I snatch it up. I'm still half in the garbage when I hear someone enter.

"What are you doing, bro?"

I jump upright, paper bag clutched in my hand, face bright red. One of my dormmates, Paul, is watching me with his glasses halfway down his nose, looking like a disapproving librarian.

"Nothing, I was just . . . er . . . looking for something."

"By digging in the trash?" He wrinkles his nose at me.

"Yeah, it's uh . . . I threw it away by accident. I put it in the wrong bin. Needs to go in recycling. Gotta save the planet, you know?" I say brightly.

He looks at me like I just grew another head and pulls a packet of pop tarts from the cupboard, and I flee back to my dorm, the weight of the plug heavy in my hand.

The bottom of the bag has a bit of orange peel stuck on it, and I flick it off and tip the plug out onto my bed, where it falls onto my sheets.

It's a dark-grey metal, smooth and shiny as a new coin, with a wide, flat base.

Fuck. Malcolm wants it inside me. I don't understand why but that means I need it inside me, like right now. I'm so fucking hard.

I wrench my pants down before I remember I haven't shut the door yet, and almost fall over myself as I stumble back across the room, my pants around my ankles. Then I move with a singular focus. Door locked. Lube in the drawer beside my bed. Boxers kicked off. Socks on or off? I shake my head—it doesn't matter!

How are you supposed to put it in? Obviously, I know where it goes, but how do you get it in there? I end up kneeling, bent over my bed, and awkwardly dollop a healthy amount of lube onto my asshole. Probably too much, because a fat drop of it slides down my leg and plops onto the threadbare carpet. I slather lube on the plug, too, getting it all slippery. It feels so solid in my hands I almost chicken out again.

Then I reach around, position the end of the plug between my cheeks and pause, closing my eyes. I imagine Malcolm standing over me. It's his hand that holds my cheeks open, his fingers that press the plug against my twitching hole. I shudder and press it in harder, and it starts to slide inside me, stretching me slightly. Fuck, it feels so good in there. My breath hitches as my hand—his hand—pushes it further inside, my hole stretches and opens up around it, and I can feel it nudging inside me, filling a space I didn't know was there, until my ring closes around the neck and the base of the plug sits against my hole.

I've never done butt stuff before, and it feels so strange and good at the same time. I'm so full. My cock is already rock-solid and leaking precum, and I want to touch it so bad, but he told me not to, and that stops me as strongly as if his hands were here holding me, controlling me.

I carefully sit back down at my desk, feeling the plug shift inside me. My hole clenches around it with every move. I sit here pretending to study and leaking into my sweatpants as I imagine Mal. When did I start thinking of him as "Mal" instead of "Malcolm?" I want to touch myself so badly, but I have to do as he says, and that makes me even harder, turns me on even more still, until I'm biting down on my lip, gripping the edge of the desk, and fighting the urge to grind down onto the plug. Is this what it would feel like to have his cock inside me?

I already know I'm not going to get any studying done, or even sleep tonight, but I can't bring myself to care. The tension twisting in my

belly, the utter frustration of not touching myself, is sinfully hot. I give up and get into bed, lying with my hands behind my back, pretending they're handcuffed, and feeling the shame and arousal burn through me.

I don't know how it came to this, but I know deep down that I already have no control over it, all I can do is hold on tight as I'm swept along in the hurricane that is Malcolm Blackwood.

5

-MALCOLM-

I STALK a few steps behind North as he walks down the hallway, drinking in the delicious view of his tight ass. It shifts and clenches in front of me in grey sweatpants, and I want nothing more than to grab a double handful of that peach and squeeze until bruises bloom across it. Above it, the wide stretch of his shoulders accentuates his slender waist and hips and I picture his hands bound at the small of his back. I don't know which is better, his front or his back side. *Both*, I decide.

His blond shiny hair is disheveled this morning—he's had a restless night, and I hope to fuck it's because of me. And from the stiff-legged way he's walking, he's either injured himself on the field, or he's wearing my plug.

That's interesting.

This whole thing has been interesting. When I caught him in the showers yesterday, I thought at first he was watching porn. But no, it was a video of me. It was him who had seen me on the field, and instead of reporting me and getting me thrown out of college, he'd recorded me. My moment of wild confusion was quickly overpowered by my ferocious urge to have him. It had taken all of my self-control not to fuck him then and there, but I needed to test the waters first. And now I had the photo on my phone of his very enthusiastic reaction. I jerked off to it last night, which seemed only fair, and told myself that it probably wouldn't go any further. After what happened, and the present I left him in his bag, I half expected him to run for the hills. Even after how horny and needy he looked in the showers, and the tangible disappointment plastered on his face when he watched me walk away. But it looks like the puppy-dog jock has more metal in him than I'd given him credit for. And a dark side. I still can't quite believe that he's not only apparently very into me, but also has natural sub tendencies too. I try not to get too excited, but he reacted to my commands perfectly.

And now it looks like he's followed my instructions. I wonder if he's been tormented all night long. It makes me instantly hard, and I shift awkwardly as I walk.

Time to push him further and see what happens. I get up close behind him and lean forward, my mouth an inch from his ear.

"Have you got it in?"

The startled noise he makes is almost cute. He jumps and spins on me, those blue eyes wide. He looks so startled and scared—so unlike the happy-go-lucky jock we all know and lust over—that my heart does a double tap at being the one responsible for it; for affecting him this much. He's exhausted, his face flushed, with deep bags under his eyes. I'm willing to bet he hasn't slept a wink all night. Because of me.

He opens his mouth but doesn't speak straight away, like he's trying to remember how to.

"I'm late for my next class," he finally says roughly, his voice low.

"That doesn't answer my question," I say.

He looks up and down the hallway, like we're going to get caught dealing drugs or something, and I have to hold in a snort. Fuck, he's adorable, so innocent and corruptible.

I want to hear him say he's got the plug in, want to hear the words coming out of his own mouth. So when he still doesn't answer I fish in my pocket and pull out a small black remote, slim as a cracker, with silver buttons, and hold it up for him to see.

"What's that?" he asks, eyeing it.

Without saying anything, I press and hold one of the buttons.

Click.

North almost falls over. He yelps and his eyes go wide as he arches his back and smacks both hands on his ass.

"So you do have it in," I say, the corner of my mouth curling.

I take my finger off the button and he sags against the wall, breathing hard, eyes wild.

"What the fuck was that?" he gasps.

"Vibrating," I say, waggling the remote again. That plug isn't cheap, it's top of the line and can be operated from long range with the touch of a button. There's five different vibration strengths and that was the very lowest, just to give him a taste. From the way his cheeks flush, he likes it more than he'd care to admit.

With a growl, he pushes away from the wall and lunges for the remote, one hand still on his ass. I pull it out of his reach, holding him

back with my shoulder for good measure. He needs to accept who's in charge here.

"This is mine, I keep it. If you don't like it, you can take the plug out." His mouth tightens pleasingly at the suggestion. "But I keep this, and I use it whenever I want."

He glares at me, his cheeks bright red, his eyes challenging. I can see the fight there, but I can also see the hunger, the excitement, and it makes the dark possessive streak in me crow with victory.

I press the button and he yelps again and falls against the wall, mouth open. With one hand, I spin him by the shoulder and shove him against the bricks, keeping that button down. I press in behind him, hard enough for him to feel my erection pressing into the top of his ass.

"Jesus," he gasps.

His shuddering body pushes back against me, and I allow him to grind for a total of three blissful seconds before I pull away, leaving him pushing back into nothing. He looks back at me, face heavy with frustration and pleading.

I slip the remote back into my pocket and offer him a cold smile.

"See you later, North. Have a nice day."

I'm going to have so much fun.

***

Throughout the rest of the day, I press the button at random intervals. I don't know if he's kept it in, but the thought of making his body jump—of flooding him with undeniable pleasure, from far away, at any time I please—is enough to keep me hard all day. Fuck, I can just imagine his startled face, the muffled yelps, and his cheeks blooming their bright red as he tries to hide it in front of everyone.

Sometimes it's a short blast, other times I keep the button pressed down for thirty seconds at a time, imagining him writhing, trying to keep still, struggling not to let his dirty secret be discovered.

It's practically torture not knowing if my fantasies are true or not, until finally, it's the last class of the day and the only one we share.

I take my seat toward the back of the lecture hall and lock eyes on North the second he walks in. He looks flushed and sweaty. Anyone else looking would think he was coming down with something, a fever

maybe. Only I know the truth. He moves to his seat with stiff limbs, one row in front of me, a few places to the left.

The back of his ears are already tipped pink, and I can tell he's fighting not to turn and look at me, but it only takes a few minutes for him to give in and peek over his shoulder. He really has terrible self-control. I can work with that.

I wink at him, and he clenches his jaw, a muscle jumping in his cheek. He looks so pissed off and it makes my heart sing, because that means he hasn't taken the plug out all day. It's confirmation that all of my fantasies actually happened, and it's so hot I feel my face start to heat too.

The professor launches into his lecture, and North tears his eyes away from mine. I stare at the back of his neck as he fidgets, a drop of sweat trickling down it.

He's nervous, just waiting for me to vibrate the plug again, he must have been on tenterhooks all day, not knowing when it was going to hit.

I can't stop myself. I slip my hand into my pocket, find the remote. I toy with it for a moment, stroking my finger along its smooth edge, circling the button slowly, teasing myself, seeing how long I can hold off. I lick my lips, then I press down, a short sharp burst.

His reaction is instant. He lets out a startled yelp that's so loud the entire class turns to look at him, and the professor stops talking.

His face is cherry red and prickling with sweat.

"North? Are you ok?" the professor asks.

I press it again and keep it on this time. North grips the edge of his seat, every muscle in his body straining.

The professor looks at him with concern, waiting for a response, and he manages a shaky, "Mm mHMm," nodding vigorously.

The professor frowns, clearly not convinced, but turns back to the presentation and carries on while the students throw North concerned looks as he continues to squirm in his seat.

The girl sitting next to North—who has a devastating crush on him like almost all the girls at college do—leans over to him, twirling her long blonde hair and pouting.

"What's wrong, North? Do you want me to take you to the nurse's office?"

North shakes his head frantically and gives her a strained smile, one eye twitching as the plug keeps vibrating inside him.

"No, I'm . . . ugh . . . f-fine."

I smirk. Nice try girl, but North is mine right now.

She sits back, disappointed, and North buries his red face in his hands, and I swear I hear a pained whimper as I keep my finger on the button. It is absolutely delicious tormenting him like this, and his struggle hangs over him in the air, like a heated haze. It might just be in my head, but I swear I can smell his arousal from here.

Fuck, this is possibly the hottest thing I've ever done, and my own dick responds to every twitch of his shoulders. I could do this all day, but I finally relent and take my finger off the button, and he slumps, letting out a shuddering breath. If I go too hard now he might cum in his pants right here in the middle of class, and as tempting as that is, I want to keep him edged all day, so he's absolutely ravenous later.

For the remainder of the class he shifts and squirms, no doubt expecting that buzz at any second, but I leave him hanging. Even from here I can see the telltale bulge in his pants.

On the way out I smile cooly at him as he glares and grinds his teeth, helplessly aroused.

"See you later, jock."

6

-NORTH-

THAT ASSHOLE. I'm tempted to pull the plug out and stuff it into his locker, unwashed. Or even better, throw it at his stupid, smug, sexy face.

But I don't, and my boner won't let me pretend that what he did wasn't arousing as fuck.

I've been sweating the entire day, the anticipation of him pressing the button almost as much of a turn-on as when he actually did. It was a struggle to hide my shame from everyone around me, the vibrating plug up my ass making me jump and flinch and squirm as my dick leaked and I ached to touch myself.

When I finally get back to the dorm, my boxers are wet and sticky. I flop down on my bed and grind my face into my hands. This is ridiculous. I'm straight. Why am I going along with this? Why is it turning me on so much?

I'm not going to his house. I'm stopping this here and now. Today was too much. I am too straight, and too busy, and too fucking horny to be able to carry on with this . . . whatever it is.

I clench my fists. This is it, I tell myself, this is final.

But in half an hour I'm redressed, unlocking my bike, and peddling to the address on the note as fast as I can. All the way I tell myself that this is crazy, this is stupid, this isn't right. It's so wrong. So incredibly, arousingly, wrong.

I make a pact with myself. It doesn't go any further than tonight. I go over there, and I get him out of my system. One and done, only I mean it this time.

I realize after like two seconds that cycling is a bad idea with a butt plug in. Every movement grinds it up inside me, and I nearly fall off. I keep pushing, feeling the grind, and sweat trickles down my face, from more than just the exercise. At one point the plug vibrates, probably Mal reminding me I'm due at his house, and I swerve and almost go

into the side of a very expensive-looking car parked at the side of the road.

By the time I roll up outside the address he gave me, I'm panting and damp. I stare up at the house. This can't be right. It looks like a mini-mansion, huge and fancy as hell, with trimmed shrubberies around the intimidating pillared doorway. I pause and consider turning back—I've never set foot in a house this grand before, and I feel horrifically out of place. Plus if I go inside there there's no telling what will happen, what I'll do, or if I'll humiliate myself. What if this is all a trick to get me back for recording him?

But I'm pulled to the door by the burning urge inside me, and knock, feeling stupidly anxious and super fucking horny, like I'm rolling up to my first date.

For a few minutes I stand here fidgeting on the doormat, almost hopping on the spot. Is he keeping me waiting on purpose?

Finally the door swings open, revealing the tall, lean figure of Mal inside, leaning his shoulder against the door frame. He gives me a critical once-over, as I squirm on the mat.

"Did you keep it in?" he asks.

"Yes," I say through my teeth.

"Did you touch yourself?"

"No, I didn't," I admit, flushing again. It's harder than I thought it'd be to admit, but I meet his eyes. One and done, I remind myself. It doesn't go any further.

He steps back, holding the door open, and motions with his head, and I scramble inside like a goddamn kicked dog being let back into his master's house.

7

-MALCOLM-

HE SAYS he kept the plug in and he didn't touch himself, and judging from the impressive bulge in his pants, I believe him. He did as he was told, such a good boy. He obviously likes being tortured.

The sight of North standing on my doorstep, flushed and sexy as sin, has my heart racing at an alarming rate. The skin of his arms and face glisten with a layer of sweat that I want to lick off, but I hold myself in check. He raises his chin, trying to look confident, but I can see the tension he's carrying in his body. He's usually so cocksure. It's almost endearing.

I step aside and he practically jumps through the door, then stops in the hall and spins toward me as I close it. He looks feral and jumpy, a million miles away from the sunny, put-together jock he normally is. I like him like this, he's less perfect, more touchable.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" I say.

His jaw clenches, rebellious. "I can take anything you dish out."

I bark out a laugh. I doubt that very much. His mouth tightens, like it's a personal challenge. Obviously, there's some kind of battle raging inside his head, but I'm not forcing him to be here, he's chosen to come. It's not my job to make anything easy on him. Let him fight his own inner demons, I have enough of my own to deal with. And anyway, it's not my problem.

He glances around the hallway and I know what he's thinking.

"My family owns it. I stay here when I'm in town studying," I fill in.

He nods, but his eyes are still wide. I know enough about him to know he lives on the rough end of town in what amounts to a trailer park —a hardworking boy from a poor family. How quaint.

Well, he's in my world now.

"Baseball," I say, and his eyes snap to me.

"What?"

"You need a safeword. I use baseball, but you can pick something else if you want."

His throat bobs as he swallows, no doubt having second thoughts. But then he squares his shoulders off and says, “Baseball is fine.”

His voice is hoarse.

“You can tap out anytime you like. I’m not going to go easy on you.”

His eyes are round saucers, his body rigid. I want to take him and make him writhe, I want to wring screams out of that corded throat, see those built shoulders bunch and strain.

I rush forward and push him up against the wall, one arm barring his chest. He lets out a startled noise when his back hits the brickwork.

“Hey!” He pushes at me, but he’s not using his full strength, the strength I feel when we’re out on the field.

“You want me to stop, use the safeword,” I snap, and he bares his teeth at me, but he doesn’t say it. I grin then snake a hand down to his groin and squeeze his dick through his pants. It’s already rock-hard and he gasps.

I’m purposefully rough, it’s how I like it, but I also want to show him how I do things before we’re in too deep. I shove him and grab him. Twist and squeeze. Take what I want without asking and wait for him to use the safeword.

He still doesn’t.

Ok.

When I pull back and release him he slides partway to the floor, gasping and red in the face, eyes heavy and spaced out with arousal.

“Do you want to stop?” I ask again.

I don’t know why I’m asking so much and delaying, he knows he can say it if he wants to. I don’t want to think about the small voice inside me saying that it’s because if we get into it and I let myself go, really let myself open up, and he backs out, it’ll hurt in a way that I don’t want it to. No. I squash it down because that’s stupid. He’s just a dumb, beautiful jock with a stunning smile and the body of a Greek god. I have a crush on him, but that’s it. He doesn’t mean anything to me. This is just some fun to help me clear the buzzing in my head.

“No,” he says.

I stare into his eyes for a moment and then break away, ignoring the twist in my chest.

“Fine.”

8

-NORTH-

MAL LEADS me further into the house and I look around as we go, intimidated by the sheer wealth on display. I knew he was rich, but not this rich. Like, owning multiple houses and having someone to fold your socks for you rich. I feel so out of place with my basic clothes while he wears a silky black shirt with the sleeves rolled up over his elbows in a way that says he's ready to get to work. Only, "work" is me.

We go into a big dining room where a long table sits surrounded by tall-backed chairs. It's pretty impressive but my eyes are drawn like a magnet to something sitting neatly on the table like a centerpiece for a very kinky dinner party. It's the handcuffs; shiny and solid, placed directly where I'll see them.

Mal walks over to the table and hops up onto it so he's sitting on the edge, blocking the cuffs from my view, legs apart, and points between his thighs.

"Stand here."

Heart racing, I do as he says. I press in between his legs, his thighs rubbing on either side of my waist, and the urge to kiss his cruel lips is overwhelming. I've never wanted to kiss a guy before. Is this what I'm supposed to do? Is this what he wants? The pull is so strong that I lean in, lips parted, to press my mouth against his. But he pulls away at the last second before we make contact and leans out of my reach, and I straighten quickly.

"What are you doing?" he snaps, irritated.

"I . . . uh . . . I just wanted to—"

"What makes you think you get to kiss me?"

My face heats and I press my lips tightly together as the urge to curl up and die ignites within me. I'm a fucking idiot, did I read this whole situation so badly? If he doesn't like me why did he ask me over here? I start to think I've got the wrong end of the stick entirely and I should just leave before I embarrass myself even more, when he speaks again.

"Strip."

It catches me off guard and I stare at him for a moment. Then my body kicks into gear and I obey him, peeling my clothes off myself slowly, feeling stupid and vulnerable. My T-shirt and jeans are folded neatly at my feet, sneakers and socks set by their side, all of it done under his judgemental eyes. I can feel them on my skin hot as the sun. When I'm down to my boxers I straighten and meet his eyes, face red hot, forcing my arms down at my sides when they want to fold across my chest. It's ridiculous because I've been in the showers with the rest of the team more times than I can count, butt naked, and I'm sure he's seen me without a top multiple times, but right now I feel so on show with him sitting watching me, fully dressed.

He gives me a tired look. "Do you not understand what strip means? All of it."

I look down at my boxers, tented over my erection, and slip them down. My cock bobs free, livid, and aching from almost twenty-four hours of teasing with the plug.

He looks down at it, lips pursed, and I swallow. I can't tell what he's thinking, whether he's impressed or not.

"Turn around and bend over," he says. "I want to see it."

I do as he says, trying not to think about what's happening.

"Hold yourself open. Both hands."

I do it, closing my eyes and tightening my jaw. I can feel the precum leaking out of me and beading on the end of my cock at the humiliation of it all. Being bossed around like this by him is doing things to me.

I wait for him to speak again, but there's only silence. I glance over my shoulder at him and see his face is flushed just like mine, his pupils blown wide. He likes what he sees. But he catches me looking and his face hardens in an instant.

"I didn't say you could look at me," he snarls.

I whip my head back.

"Stay still, and don't make a noise," he says.

Without warning the plug vibrates inside me and I jerk forward, straightening and yelping. Then his hand is on the back of my neck, gripping tight and forcing my head down, back into position. "I said don't move. Is it that hard for you to follow instructions?"

"No," I gasp. "Sorry I just—"

"I told you not to talk," he snaps, giving my head another shove until I'm almost bent fully in half, my hands still holding my cheeks apart.

I almost say sorry again and manage to stop myself just in time.

“If you can’t follow my instructions by yourself, I’m going to have to make you,” he says.

Before I know what’s happening I feel cold metal around my wrists and the snap of cuffs closing, locking both of my hands together behind my back. He’s using the handcuffs on me, the ones that have haunted me since I first saw them two nights ago, and I realize with a stab of arousal that I’m in my fantasy, it’s happening, and it’s so much hotter than I thought possible.

He spins me and bends me over the table, pressing my face down against the polished wood by my neck, and I fight to stifle a groan.

Smack

The hit makes me cry out in surprise as fire spreads through my ass.

“What the fuck?”

I wriggle, bucking my shoulders away from the table, but his strong arm holds me down.

“You know how to make it stop,” he says.

The safeword. Baseball. It’s on my lips, but I close my teeth around it. He waits, giving me a chance I’m not going to take. After a pause he spanks me again, jerking my body against the table and my cock swings between my legs.

He keeps going until my ass is burning and numb at the same time. Sweat drips down my body. When he stops, my eyes are streaming and my aching cock is leaking even more. My whole body hums with energy.

“This is what happens when you don’t follow my instructions,” he says. “Understand?”

I keep my mouth shut, catching myself just in time, and nod. That must pass his test, because he lets go of the back of my neck, and I hold still.

“That’s better.”

After a moment, I feel his fingers toying with the tip of my cock, smearing the slickness there over my head, stroking the pad over my slit. It’s a struggle but I still don’t move or make a sound. I follow his instructions, and he’s rewarding me. My chest burns.

Then his fingers close around the shaft and squeeze hard. His warmth presses against my back as he leans over me. My hands press into his belly.

“Don’t come without my permission, or I’ll have to punish you again.”

My hairs stand on end, and I jerk my head once.

He turns on the butt plug and it vibrates inside me, pressing on my prostate, and my skin crawls with the need to squirm. He puts the remote down, but the plug keeps on vibrating. Is he trying to torture me? How the fuck am I supposed to not come with this grinding inside me. Sweat prickles over my skin. He leaves me there for a moment, letting me stew, and it literally takes all of my physical and mental strength not to move as the buzzing spreads jangling pleasure through my body.

“Why did you come here?” he says.

I pant into the surface of the table. I’m not allowed to talk. Is he trying to trick me so he can punish me again? As appealing as that sounds, I don’t think my ass can take it, it’s already burning. So I don’t reply.

I hear a huff of breath and then he says.

“You can talk if I ask you a question.”

“Because you told me to,” I say.

“Why did you take that video of me?”

I hesitate. It’s hard to think with the pleasure of the plug rippling through my body, making my head dizzy with need.

“I . . . I don’t know.”

Another huff, and I cut him off before he can reply. “No, I mean it. I don’t know. I just saw you and . . . I couldn’t help it. I had to.”

He’s quiet for a while and I wish I could see his face. I wait for him to reply, but whatever he was digging for he seems to have found.

After what feels like hours he pulls me off the table by my neck and shoves me into a living room. He gets me up on a wide low coffee table, it’s top made of crystal-clear glass. He pushes me on my knees, head and shoulders down, ass in the air.

“Lift up your head.”

I really try to, but with my hands secured behind me, and all my weight pressing down on my shoulders, my muscles clench and my back strains, but I don’t go anywhere. My abs are good, but not that good. I open my mouth but then hesitate. Am I allowed to speak again? He hasn’t asked me anything. But I don’t want it to seem like I’m disobeying him. I try again, but it’s no good.

“I . . . I can’t do it,” I say.

I tense, expecting a spank on my raised ass; not only did I speak, I failed to follow an instruction. But there's only silence, then the sound of him walking away. I want to turn my head to look, but that counts as moving without permission, doesn't it?

He comes back, and his fingers curl under my shoulder. I'm lifted slightly, and something soft slips under me—a cushion that pads my head and shoulders against the hard glass table top. Is he trying to make me comfortable? It's so out of character for him that I look up at him, and he frowns.

"I don't want your sweaty face marking my table," he says.

Oh, ok.

And there was me thinking he was actually being nice to me. This is Mal Blackwood, I remind myself, of course he wouldn't be nice to you. You're only here because he enjoys tormenting you, and for some reason, you get off on it.

Before I can get too disappointed, he crouches next to the table and slides his finger into my mouth, and I close my lips around it, sucking. He freezes. He didn't tell me to suck it, and I worry that he's going to tell me off, but then he starts to move in slow pumps, before another slides in and I relax. I don't want him to tell me to stop.

My body hums with electricity. I lap on his fingers like I'm starving. The fingers push in deeper, and I open my mouth to allow him more access. He adds a third finger and starts pressing into the back of my mouth, dangerously close to my throat. If he goes any further, I'm going to be gagging on him, and I mutter around his fingers in warning. He spanks my ass for the noise, and the vibrating plug jolts against me, and my spine stiffens.

"Keep quiet while I play with you, fucktoy."

Oh shit. I hold in a groan and he fucks his fingers into my mouth harder.

"Swallow around them," he says.

I try my best to but only end up gagging, and my eyes water.

"If you can't take my fingers, there's no way you can take my dick," he says.

It feels like a threat. *I can take them*, I want to shout. I suck with renewed vigor, desperate to show him I can do it, desperate for the chance to taste his dick.

After a while, he pulls his fingers out, and I don't know if I've done a good enough job for him to let me suck him off. My eyes light up when

he unzips his pants.

"Is this what you want?" he asks.

"Yes," I say, not caring how wrecked I sound.

"Why did you come here?"

This again? I want him to hurry up and fuck my mouth already, let me taste him. "Because I wanted to," I say.

"And why did you record me?"

"I was curious," I say, hoping that's enough this time.

He raises an eyebrow. He doesn't look convinced. "You're going to suck my dick," he says. "And I don't want to feel any teeth, or you know what will happen."

I nod vigorously.

He pulls his cock out, and I forget how to breathe. The first time I saw it on the field, it was a long way off in the dark, and the second time in the showers I was too shocked to really take it in. Now, with it inches away from my face, I can see it in all its glory. Long and thick, its head dark and smooth. I can't help but imagine how good it'll feel inside me.

I lick my lips. They're wet with my spit, feeling swollen and already raw from his finger fucking. I realize what that was now, he was getting me used to it, to the sensation of something big pumping into my mouth, because of course, I've never had a cock in my mouth before.

Does he know that? It occurs to me that I know almost nothing about him, and I don't think he knows anything about me either. Up until yesterday he was entirely uninterested in my existence. Does he know I'm not gay, that this is my first time with a man?

Maybe you can ask him after you suck his huge man cock, says a small voice at the back of my head sarcastically.

Ok, maybe I have some self-reflecting to do, but now isn't the time.

He presses in close to me, his cock drawing close to my lips, and my mouth waters as I lick at the tip. I want to take the whole thing into my mouth, but when I reach for it he backs his hips away, only letting me have access to the very end. I whimper before I can cut it off, and get rewarded with a slap to the ass. My dick twitches, and I have to take a moment to just breathe and try to keep myself from boiling over as my legs shake and my core tenses.

"Don't you dare come before I tell you to, fucktoy," he says.

Shit, that'd be so much easier if he stopped saying things like that. I nod helplessly, open my mouth again, and he allows me to suck at the tip, tasting his precum.

I want to beg him to let me have more, but I control myself, and he rewards me by inching closer, pushing his whole head into my hungry mouth. It's so much bigger than his fingers, and my lips stretch around it as I suck it in, obscenely grateful for the honor.

Malcolm Blackwood is allowing me to suck on his cock, something that up until yesterday I didn't know I wanted. Funny how quick things can change, because right this second, there's nothing I want more.

I suck hard, taking him into my mouth as far as I can, and he starts to thrust. His dick knocks against the back of my throat, and it constricts as I gag around him. His hand twists in my hair and his movements become jagged, and then the next moment he's grunting breathlessly and his cum is filling my mouth, flooding down my throat.

I lose myself and I swallow it down a second before he tells me to. But again, he doesn't punish me, too caught up in his orgasm to care.

He groans and bends forward until his forehead rests against my back, sticky against my skin. His breath huffs between my shoulders. For some reason I thought he would last a lot longer than that, I only just started really sucking before he came. He's usually so . . . self-controlled. And I made him lose it, which is just the fucking sexiest thing.

I keep sucking the cum out of his dick, until he pulls it out and straightens, pushing his hair out of his face, looking flustered. I grin up at him with wet lips, enjoying this new side of him, and he frowns.

"Don't look so happy with yourself. I haven't finished yet."

As if that's a bad thing.

9

-NORTH-

HE GRABS the controller and turns the butt plug up to full, and I spasm as the vibration shoots through me straight to my already throbbing dick. I'm so desperate to come that I can't help but flex my hips, thrusting into the open air again for any kind of friction.

He just stands there watching me, drinking in my torture.

"Why did you come here?" he says for the third time.

I don't even try to think before I answer him this time, and the truth spills out of me. "Because I can't stop thinking about you."

He blinks a few times. But he doesn't comment.

"Why did you record me?"

"Because seeing you like that was the hottest fucking thing I've ever seen, and I want you to fuck me." It comes out all strangled and desperate, and to my surprise, I sound like I'm about to cry.

His dick is filling again. Is it because of what I said, or does he just enjoy watching me struggle?

"You want me to fuck you?"

"Yes."

"You want me to stretch your hole around my dick, and use you as I please, like the fucktoy you are?"

Fuck, I'm so close to coming. "Please," I say.

"What if I keep you here, tied up on my table, with my plug vibrating inside your greedy hole, just ready and waiting for me whenever I want to play with you? Just a hole for my cock and nothing else. You'd have to wait here all day until I get back from class, until you're dripping and begging for me to use you like a whore. I could tease you and torment you for as long as I wanted. And then maybe I'd take my time to really take you apart bit by bit, until you're screaming. Or maybe I'd just fuck you raw."

"Oh god."

My hips buck again, the plug pulsing against me with every movement.

“Wait,” he says. There’s a cold smear of something around the base of the plug, then it’s pulled from my ass, leaving me clenching on nothing. More cold lube, and I feel his fingers pressing into me. The prep is minimal, and before I can think about that fact that his fingers are in my asshole, they’re replaced by something hot and firm pressing between my cheeks. I catch my breath as I realize it’s the blunt head of his cock, lining up to impale me. In one slow movement, his dick starts to slide in. It’s huge, so much bigger than the plug, and my hole stretches around him, igniting fire across my ass. I yelp. It’s not going to fit, he’s going to break me apart. He goes slowly, but the steady invasion and resulting stretch doesn’t pause until finally he’s all the way inside me, and I’m crying out. He’s so fucking big, I feel like there’s no room in my body for anything but his cock.

“Oh fuck,” I pant.

My knees buckle, but he holds me up by my waist as he starts to ram into me, hard enough to bruise. I can’t breathe, I can’t move, all I can do is take his cock and moan like a fucking porn star as he smashes into my already sensitive prostate as the two days of unrelenting horniness come to a head.

My hands clench behind me, my toes curl. Wild noises erupt from my mouth and fill the air.

“Don’t you dare come yet,” he growls between thrusts.

But I’m not going to make it, his cock pushes me higher and higher, pounding relentlessly into my sweet spot, and I’m already cresting as my orgasm looms over me, my body rocking, my hole clenching around him.

I’m going to come, I can’t hold it, I’m going to—

“Now,” he says.

I don’t know if it’s his permission or just coincidence, but the second the word is out of his mouth I explode. My hips jack, sending ropes of cum up my chest and across the glass. My mind is completely gone, and I moan in wordless bliss as the cock in my ass keeps me going, sending me crashing in wave after wave of bliss, until my body is entirely wrung out and I go limp in his hands.

All too soon he lets me collapse, losing his cock from my ass in the process, and I fall into the puddle of my own cum, smearing it across the glass. So much for not staining it. I roll onto my side, legs splayed, panting, my slick flesh sticking to the cold hard surface. My whole body is heaving, and my mind is floating far away somewhere in a pink cloud.

Through the cloud of bliss, I hear his footsteps recede and return, then his fingers are on my cock. I twitch, pushing my dick blindly into the warmth of his hand as the afterglow still ripples through me. I'm overcome with the urge for him to lie down and throw his arms around me, cuddle me, kiss my trembling lips. But instead of his warm grip, I feel cold metal.

I look down in a haze just in time to see him clicking something over my cock and balls, a twisted cage of fine metal that hugs my dick tightly on all sides.

"What?" I murmur.

"This is to make sure no one gets you off but me. Your cock belongs to me now, and you don't come, you don't even get hard, without my permission."

My mind is moving too slowly to keep up with what's happening, and then, with efficient movements, he locks a tiny padlock on the cage with a key on a chain, and hangs it around his neck. I stare up at him and open my mouth to protest. This wasn't the plan. I came here to get him out of my head, a good fuck to get it out of the system, to cure my strange and sudden obsession with him so I can move on and get back to normal. Not for it to go even further.

For a moment the safeword bubbles up onto my tongue. I should say it, I should end this before it gets even more out of hand. He has my cock in a cage for fuck's sake.

But his dark eyes are watching me for a reaction, and I can read something in them that wasn't there before. Something other than the hard, cold disregard that always lives there, something I want to chase down.

The moment passes. He uncuffs my hands, steps back, and watches as I slowly push myself up. I feel entirely sapped of energy. My head is still spinning.

He tosses a pile of clothes down on the table next to me, and I pick them up before I realize they're not the ones I came in with.

"These aren't mine,'' I say.

It's a top and jeans, similar to mine in style, but they're brand new, still with the tags on.

"Yours were no good," he says shortly. "Wear these."

No good? I unfold the clothes, completely confused. I don't know if I should be offended, pissed off, or grateful. They're well-made, thick and

durable, but still soft. They're much nicer than anything I've ever owned. I run my hands over the fabric and look up at him again.

"Thank you," I say.

He stiffens and doesn't say anything.

This is getting weird. Ok, more weird, if that's possible. Now that I've come I feel lost, aimless. I want to go back to my dorm. I pull the clothes on—he's even given me socks and boxers—then pat my pockets.

"I don't have my—"

Before I can finish he holds out my phone. He must have gotten it from my jeans, wherever they are. I want to ask but I'm just too brain fucked, so I grab my bag and head for the door.

He follows me out and on the threshold I pause. We stand for a moment in awkward silence.

"I've put my number in your phone," he says. "The plug is in your bag. I'll message you when I want you to put it in."

I hesitate. It's hot, but he sounds like he's instructing someone on how to dog sit for him—one bowl of kibble in the morning, don't let him hump the furniture.

"Er. Ok," I say. "This was fun, I guess?"

He gives me a tight-lipped nod, like I'm being dismissed. "Wait for my message."

I frown. Do I like being treated like this? Being given terse instructions and expected to follow? My dick tells me I do, but my heart tells me I want something more from him. I'm just not sure what it is.

Or maybe I am, because the next second I'm leaning forward into his space, lips first, going in for a kiss I didn't know was coming.

He jerks back, making a noise that's part startled, part horrified, and I pull up short. I shouldn't be surprised by his reaction, it's already happened once, but it still stings.

Again, I realize that I really don't know anything about Mal. All these strange signals are confusing me; he keeps doing things that would be nice, sweet even, in any other circumstances, but then acting cold. He has the key to my fucking cock cage around his neck, but he won't let me kiss him.

I'm even more confused than I was before I came here. At least before I was certain in the fact that he hated me, and now . . . I just don't know. I sigh. Right now, I'm too tired to try to work out the puzzle that he is. I'm still blissed out, and for the first time in three days I feel

like I can actually get some sleep, even with this weird cage on my cock. All I want to do is get back to my dorm and pass out for twelve hours.

I step out of the door as he leans on the frame. The restrictive metal shifts against my new boxers. Boxers he gave me. I came here to put an end to it, and now he has me wearing his clothes, locked in his cage and ready to be filled with his plug at a moment's notice. How did this happen? It's like he owns me already.

As I walk back to my bike, I look over my shoulder at the dark shape of him standing in the shaft of light. He's watching me, and when our eyes meet he purses his lips and looks to the side, like I've just caught him doing something shameful.

What the fuck have I gotten involved in? But I know that when he calls I'll come crawling back on my hands and knees for another taste of his cock. I should be ashamed by that, but I'm too tired. I'll process all of this tomorrow when I have the energy to care.

For now, I need to get back before I pass out. I climb on my bike without looking back, and ten minutes later I'm back at my dorm.

I'm already asleep when my head hits the pillow.

EPILOGUE

-MALCOLM-

MY HEART slams as I watch him disappear into the night. Despite its breakneck pace, I feel calmer than I have in years. The buzzing in my head has stopped. It might only be for a few hours, but the silence is blissful.

This is probably a terrible idea. He's so beautiful, and nice, and good. And messy, and impulsive. Everything I'm not. Everything I don't let myself get involved in. And when he tried to kiss me I felt my control slip for just a moment . . .

Because there's a part of me deep down that wants more from him, more than I've ever wanted from anyone else. I've wanted it since I first laid eyes on him. But I can't allow it. I can't let him get too close. There are too many things that can go wrong. Too many things that can escape my control. And, honestly, I'm too much of a fucking coward.

No, I can't let him in. But that doesn't mean I can't use him, break him in, until he's entirely mine. I'm going to own his body, mind, and soul. He won't be able to have a thought without me knowing about it. He'll give me all of himself and receive nothing of me in return.

He will be mine.

CAGED BY MY TEAMMATE

1

-NORTH-

THE COCK cage is uncomfortable. But I guess that's kinda the point.

A few days ago, if someone had told me I'd be struggling to concentrate in bio class, surrounded by my fellow students, with this thing attached to my dick, I would have laughed so hard a little bit of pee came out. Because that would never happen to me. But that was a few days ago, and now here I am, shifting in my seat, the metal bars of the cage snug around my cock, trying to follow what the professor is saying. And no one around me knows. Except for one person—the guy wearing the key on a chain around his neck.

He's sitting two rows behind me, three seats to the right, staring at the back of my neck like a hawk tracking a rabbit. I don't need to turn around to know, I can *feel* his eyes on me, like a laser beam. That's how intense he is. Oh, and I'm ignoring him.

Well, as much as anyone *can* ignore the intense energy of Malcolm Blackwood. I can practically feel his presence reaching out to me, pressing down on me from behind. I fiddle with the pen in my hands. I'm not going to look at him.

Last night, Malcolm handcuffed me and fucked my brains out. My ass is still throbbing from his "punishments." He was rough and demanding and—let's just get this straight right now; I'm not gay, never have been—but I loved every damn second of it. Like, desperate for more, eyes rolling back, "fuck me harder, daddy" loved it. So, that's new. And, as if that isn't enough to thoroughly freak me the fuck out, before my afterglow had even dimmed, he'd slammed this cold metal cage on my dick and kicked me out of his house. I get that he's not the cuddly type, and to be honest I don't really know what the protocol is when you fuck your straight teammate into oblivion, but a little bit of *something* would have been nice. A kiss on the cheek maybe. Or even just a goddam smile. But nada.

So, you could say I'm confused as hell. Does he like me? Does he hate me? I really have no idea. Afterward I was too tired and fucked out to process it. But now I've had the best sleep in weeks—the magic of a thorough dicking I guess—and after twelve hours of blissful shut-eye my brain is working properly again. And what it's saying is that Mal is a batshit crazy asshole. A crazy asshole with the key to my cock's freedom around his neck. Not the best situation to be in.

I'm not sure how I managed to get so deep into this mess so quickly, but I'm going to do the only reasonable thing—end it as soon as class is over. It's taken all morning to build the courage up to do it face-to-face. I could have just messaged him, but he has that key, and who knows what crazy thing he'll do with it. So, I need to do it in person. A grimace twists my lips at the thought of a confrontation like that. I hate them. But I'm getting that key and I'm taking this damn thing off. And then I'm going to ask Becki out and have nice, normal, boring sex with her. And I'm never going to fantasize about Mal tying me down and fucking me into a gibbering mess ever again.

My cock twitches inside its cage at the thought, and I shift in the hard wooden seat. My dick is an idiot, and I'm not listening to it.

Professor Halloway gestures at the wide board at the front of the room as he speaks—something about enzymes?—and I realize I haven't taken in a word of anything he's said so far. Goddam Malcolm and my dick are conspiring against me. I'm falling behind in this class, and I really need to start picking it up. I can't afford another fail; I'm on thin ice as it is.

I've managed to take in about two minutes of the lecture when my phone vibrates in my pants pocket, a small buzz that makes me sit up. Not looking around, I slip the phone out and check the message under the desk.

Psycho: Have you got it in?

Before I can stop myself, I'm looking over my shoulder. Malcolm is leaning back in his seat like a lazy storm cloud; big and dark and foreboding, and entirely unbothered with everything that's going on around him. His black shirt shows off the width of his shoulders and upper arms, and makes his skin look even paler. His hands are under his desk, holding his phone. My attention is sucked to his eyes like a

black hole, shadowed under his lowered brows, and something like an electric current passes between us.

I jerk back around, stuff my phone back in my pocket, and stare straight ahead. Nope. Not today, Satan.

Instantly, the phone vibrates again, sending shivers along my leg. I ignore it. It goes off four more times in quick succession, each time making my heart do a weird little flip. I stare straight ahead, hands curled into fists on my thighs. Nope, nope, nope. Not interacting. He can wait until the end of class, and then I'll rip the Band-Aid off quickly.

The vibrating stops, and then something small hits the back of my head and I jump. A small wad of screwed up paper bounces onto my desk. He's throwing paper at me? Seriously? How old is he? I flick it off the table and keep my focus forward, even as every fiber of my being urges me to spin around, face the danger head on, keep the predator in my field of view. Another ball of paper hits my shoulder, a light tap. Another skims past my ear. It sails over the desk in front of me, and the guy sitting there turns around, frowning. I give him my usual harmless smile, shrug and roll my eyes—*immature idiots, amiright?*—and that seems to placate him. He pulls a face in agreement and turns back.

If Mal doesn't stop being stupid, someone is going to realize something's going on between us before I have a chance to finish it. But then he'd probably love that, it'd be one more thing to torment me with.

The balls stop flying, and for a moment I let myself believe that he's finally given up trying to get my attention, until the professor stops abruptly mid-sentence and looks up.

"Malcolm? What are you doing?"

I spin. Malcolm is up on his feet and walking toward me.

"I need to take care of something urgently," he says, and his eyes flick over me.

I start to panic. Shit! He's coming over here. Is he going to expose my dirty secret in front of everyone? I press a hand over the cage instinctively, to hide my shame. But then he passes by without even a glance my way and heads for the door. Professor Halloway doesn't know what to make of it any more than I do, and he hesitates as Malcolm pushes the door open, unsure if he should challenge him or not. All eyes are on Malcolm as he leaves the room, and I sag in my chair.

Halloway clears his throat. "Ok . . . well. Where was I?"

He gets the class back on track, but now I'm far too distracted to take any of it in. Malcolm didn't expose me, but my heart is still in my mouth. Where's he going? What's he up to? Why am I more nervous now that he's not in the room, than when he was? I know it has something to do with me.

My phone goes off again, making me jump, and I fumble it out of my pocket and steal a glance at it under the table. The list of unread messages pops up.

Psycho: Answer my question, Nolan.

Psycho: Are you ignoring me?

Psycho: Turn around.

Psycho: You're starting to piss me off.

Psycho: I'm going to fuck your tight little asshole so hard you won't be able to walk for a fucking week.

Jesus. Why does that make my balls ache? There's something very wrong with me. At the bottom, I read his most recent message:

Psycho: Make an excuse to leave and meet me in the restroom. Now.

I lick my lips and glance around to make sure no one's looking, then type a speedy reply.

Me: no leave me alone

That's really going to piss him off. Malcolm isn't the kind of person who likes being told no. He starts to type something, and I hold my breath, expecting an angry reply; maybe another threat of a hard fucking—my face burns at the thought. But then it vanishes. I stare at the screen, but no new message comes through.

Ok. So, what does this mean then?

Has he got the hint?

Am I off the hook?

. . . Is he going to follow me home and murder me and hide my body under the bleachers?

My mind is still whirring a minute later when the sound of the door swinging open makes me look up. Mal strides back into the room like he owns it, cool and unfazed. Instead of taking his seat, he approaches Professor Halloway at the front, who frowns at the disruption and speaks quietly to him. I watch, literally on the edge of my seat. What the hell is he saying? The professor nods at whatever it is and looks at me.

"North, Coach Nelson wants to see you in his office."

Like hell he does. Mal watches me, eyes narrow. We both know he's lying, and he's waiting to see what I'll do. I could refuse to go, but that would probably look even weirder to everyone else here who has no idea what's going on. So, I stand slowly, reluctantly, and sling my bag over my shoulder. I march out of the room stiffly, with Mal hot on my heels. He waits just long enough for the door to swing shut behind us, so we're blocked from view, before he grabs me by the shoulder.

"Hey!" I say and try to jerk away. But he grips on hard and hustles me down the hall without speaking. I'm pretty well-built, you have to be as the star player of the football team, but he pushes me along with ease. I stumble, my feet tangling under me. Then he swivels and propels me through a door.

As soon as we're in the restroom he jerks me around to face him. I slap his hands off me. He lets go of my shoulders and takes my jaw in his hand, pressing my back against the closed door.

"Why are you ignoring me?" he hisses, his eyes burning.

"Do you want a list?" I hiss right back at him. "You're crazy. You're an asshole. There's something seriously wrong with you."

His jaw tightens. "You didn't already know that?"

I open my mouth and stop. Yeah, I guess I did. I just didn't realize how true it was.

He looks absolutely manic, and even though warning bells are going off in my head like crazy, it makes certain parts of me heat up. I have to fight the urge to push forward into his hand to increase the pressure on my jaw. What kind of reaction is that? I shake my head and knock his hands away again.

"I can't do this anymore. I don't know why I agreed to go along with it to start with, morbid curiosity, I guess. But whatever this is, I want out. I'm not into it."

It's true, or at least it *should* be. Until now I've been exclusively into women, and zero kinky shit. Hell, before last night I'd never even kissed a guy . . . which, actually, come to think of it, I still haven't. Which just

confirms his epic level of crazy. He'll stick his whole dick in my mouth, but the thought of kissing me is too repulsive?

He's briefly taken aback, like the idea that I wouldn't enjoy being tormented by him is incomprehensible, and then his face darkens. "You seemed very into it last night," he says.

I choke. "Yeah, well, I guess there's something wrong with me too. But I'm fixing it right now."

He smells annoyingly good this up close and personal, and it's throwing me off. I go to push past him, but he shoves me back against the door and snarls into my face. "If you want to stop, say the safeword."

"No." I scoff and roll my eyes. I want to stop. Of course I do. But I'm not saying his dumb safeword, it's stupid.

"Are you wearing the plug?" he asks out of nowhere.

"No, of course not!" I say.

"Why not?"

Because you didn't tell me to put it back in yet. I squash the thought frantically.

"Because I *want out*. I mean it."

His face tightens. "Is this because of last night? If you require more aftercare, that is something I can accommodate in our sessions." The oddly formal words are forced out through gritted teeth. "I didn't follow my usual process last night. If that's what has put you off."

I stare at him. Of all the things I'm expecting him to say, this isn't one of them. Is he *apologizing* to me? No, that can't be right, he doesn't know the meaning of the word.

"Do you like me or not?" The question slips out without thinking.

He blinks, caught off guard. "What's that got to do with anything?"

"Because you fucked my brains out and then kicked me out of the house!"

"I didn't kick you out."

"You made it pretty fucking obvious you wanted me to leave. I might not be a mastermind academic genius like you, but I'm not fucking dense. Unlike you I know how to interact with other humans. What is wrong with you?" I say. "I have no idea what your issue is with me."

He stiffens again, his face darkening.

"Of course you don't, you're just a dumb jock. Does it upset you that not everyone here is completely in love with you? Get over

yourself."

"*Me* get over myself? *You* get over yourself!" I snap back. "Just because you're big and dark and brooding, you think that makes you cool? Think it makes you better than me? Because you've got a huge fucking mansion and a rich dad? It just makes you weird."

"You have no fucking idea what you're talking about. Just like you have no idea about anything."

I shove him and he stumbles back a step. I take the chance to get a deep breath in that doesn't smell like him.

His face settles into a cold mask. Then, without a word, he pushes me against the wall again. I'm about to push him back when he drops to his knees in front of me and tears my pants open.

I freeze.

2

-NORTH-

HE YANKS my pants down, followed by my briefs until they're both pooled around my ankles, and I can feel the brush of his breath against the sensitive skin of my groin.

Shit, he's going to suck my cock.

Arousal blasts through me and my dick responds. But he doesn't lean in any closer, and the next moment he fishes something small and shiny out from the neck of his top.

The key.

That's when I remember I'm still wearing the cock cage. He's not going to suck me off, he's unlocking me. He's taking the contraption off my dick and setting me free.

The flash of disappointment is so strong and unexpected that I can almost taste it.

It takes all of my strength not to moan when he takes my trapped dick and fits the key into the small padlock holding it in place. The small amount of contact from his fingers through the bars is utter bliss. There's a twist, a click, and then all too quickly it's off. My dick hangs free and keeps on filling, but in a blink, he shoves the cage into his bag and pushes me out of the way. The door swings shut behind him with a quiet click.

I slump against the wall, my heart hammering inside my chest. Jesus Christ, if he'd have actually tried to suck me off, I would have let him. Hell, I still want him to. It's scary how quickly I lost any will to fight.

I let out a shaky breath and swipe a hand through my hair, feeling shaken. Aside from my terrifying lack of self-control, confrontations are the fucking worst, and even though we've only had sex once, what just happened feels far too much like a breakup. Does that make him my crazy ex?

Now that it's got its freedom back, my dick is still reacting to the meager touch it got from Mal. It juts out, painfully hard.

I glare at it. “I hope you’re happy. You got me into this whole mess. That was fucking stressful.”

It doesn’t seem to care. Maybe I should . . . take care of it. But no, there’s no way I wouldn’t be thinking about Mal, and jerking off over him now would be all kinds of messed up. So I tuck myself away and sort my shit out.

There’s no sign of him in the hallway. Did I think he would be lurking, waiting to pounce on me again like some kind of animal? That’s it then. Experimental phase over. Back to real life.

“North!”

The call makes me jump, but it’s not Mal. At the end of the hallway Professor Halloway is leaning out of his room. His expression looks like bad news. I cover my crotch, aware that my boner is still raging, and try to look like nothing just happened.

He gestures with his head into his office. “Can you come here please? I need to speak to you.”

* * *

I failed.

The paper in my hands is a wall of meaningless black text, apart from the small part tucked in right at the bottom which is practically glowing. I read the score again.

I failed.

I’m failing.

“You missed the test results feedback since you had to go see the coach.” The professor perches on the edge of his desk, legs crossed neatly, but my eyes are glued to the words of doom on the paper in my hand. “I don’t have to tell you how disappointed I am. Your work isn’t up to academic standards. And this has been happening for too long. If we don’t see improvement soon, I’m afraid the admission team will have to consider the validity of your studying here with us.”

That does make me look up. My heart is in my stomach, my stomach is in my feet. They’re going to kick me out. I’m screwed. I’m so screwed. They’re going to kick me out and my career prospects are going to go down the toilet.

“But . . . the football team?” I say. They need me. I’m the star player. That has to count for something. But Professor Halloway just

shakes his head.

"I'm afraid it's not enough to save you if your academic scores aren't up to scratch. And right now, they really aren't. Catching up is your only option."

There's no way I'm going to be able to catch up. I'm fucked.

"I'll catch up, I promise," I say.

"Please do, I would hate to see someone as bright as you throw his future away." He sighs. "You're a nice guy, North, but I've cut you all the slack I can. You need to get your butt in gear before it's too late."

"Yes sir. I will."

I'm fucked.

* * *

I might as well just quit now.

I've been sitting here for hours, hunched over my tiny desk with the overhead lamp bleaching the page white. My eyes ache, the words blur and shift together, and a constant state of horniness buzzes in my ear like a hornet, drawing my attention, making me fidget.

I blink hard. Come on North, get with it. Concentrate. I'm not dumb, but it can take a few tries for something to click, and it doesn't help that I'm so easily distracted. Over the last few days—weeks, months even if I'm honest—I've let it slip more than I should, and then with the whole thing with Mal, I've been too busy either fantasizing about him or concentrating on *not* fantasizing about him. That's all over now, so I should be able to think about something other than him. So why can't I concentrate?

I push back from the desk with a groan and run a hand over my face. It's like my cock is making the most of its freedom and demanding I join in by giving it attention. You'd think it hadn't been touched for years. It was only locked up for like twelve hours for fuck's sake.

Great, and now I'm thinking about Mal taking the cage off, the slight brush of his fingers against me, tantalizing and inadequate. And how I wanted him to grab my dick hard, pin me against that door, and do whatever he wanted to me. And, shit, now I'm thinking about the things that he *did* do to me. How he cuffed me, naked, on full display, as he used my mouth and then my ass. My cock twitches, and it feels like someone just turned the heat up in my room by a few degrees.

My eyes drift up to the laptop next to me on the desk and the forbidden tab I have open, hidden behind the others; the one of the gay porn site that I haven't had the guts to properly look at yet.

Studying is almost impossible when I'm this horny, and I need to take a break anyway. I can just take a glance at it.

Checking over my shoulder as if someone might be crouched in the corner of my dorm room spying on me, I click open the tab. The background is black, with large video thumbnails that show a short preview when I hover the mouse over them. My body is clenched up tight. I scroll through the videos on the front page, hovering over each, sneaking just a taste, fizzing energy building in my belly.

I keep going until I find one that catches my attention more than the others and lean closer. The thumbnail shows a shot of a guy tied naked over some kind of wooden bench, with his lips stretched around a bright red ball gag. His wrists and ankles are strapped to the legs of the bench, holding him in place. He can't move or speak, he's entirely helpless. I chew on the inside of my cheek, adrenaline shooting through me like I might get caught at any moment, and hover my mouse over it. The image jumps into life, and another guy comes into the shot. He's big, and completely naked. His torso is sculpted with muscle, and his dick is already standing up away from his body, huge and thick. His heavy-lidded eyes take in the twitching man strapped down and exposed before him. As I watch with bated breath, he takes up position between the guy's stretched legs, and starts fucking him from behind. The tied guy's face screws up around the gag as he's penetrated. And my body tenses along with him.

Is that what I looked like last night? Has Mal ever gagged someone like that? Would he do it to me?

My hand drifts down to my groin, and I stroke the bulge through the fabric. The touch feels like fire, and the pleasure that jolts through me is enough to snap me back. Shit, what am I doing? I need to study, not jerk off to BDSM porn.

I close the tab, close the browser, and then close the whole laptop for good measure.

But now I'm impossibly horny, my cock desperate for attention and straining in the confines of my underwear. When I'm in this state the only thing that will work is to pump one out and get it done with. But I'm not going to look at any kinky gay porn, and I'm *not* going to think about Mal. I'm going to jerk one out and then get back to work.

Getting straight to it, I slip my hand into my sweatpants and grip my dick, no messing around. It's achingly hard already, and I stroke along its length, shuddering at the feeling.

Don't think about him. Don't think about him.

I try with everything in me, but he comes barging his way into my mind anyway. And suddenly it's his hand on my dick instead of mine, wringing the pleasure from me as I struggle and try to pull away. But he's too powerful, he's too strong, and he holds me down and makes me enjoy it.

I reach climax embarrassingly quickly, and grunt as I come, grabbing a tissue to catch the erratic spill that catches me off guard. As the bliss rolls over me, I slump back in my chair. But it's dim and fleeting. Unsatisfying and hollow. My cock shrinks back down, satiated for now, but I can tell it won't last long. In no time at all it'll rise from the dead. I need to do something to stop it or I'm never going to be able to catch up on my studies.

I think of the cock cage, keeping me in check all last night and this morning. It didn't stop the mental arousal, but it stopped the physical one at least. And with that on, getting distracted wouldn't even be an option.

Drastic times call for drastic measures. I pick up my phone and type out a message.

Me: hey i need it back

I'm surprised when a reply comes through almost instantly. I wasn't really expecting him to respond after what happened today.

Psycho: What?

Me: the cage. i need to borrow it again for a little while so i can concentrate

Psycho: Then buy one yourself.

For some reason the idea of buying myself one is too embarrassing to even consider. And what would be the point if I had the key? I know I'd just let myself out whenever I wanted to jerk off.

Me: that wont work

Psycho: I thought you didn't want anything to do with me. I'm crazy, right?

I cringe.

Me: you think i would be asking if i had another option? i just need to borrow it for a bit so i can study and then ill give it back. ill pay you if you want.

Psycho: Fuck off. I don't want your money.

Me: this is really important. please

There's no reply this time. I lock my phone and throw it onto the bed, cursing. That asshole. Why did I bother asking him? Of course he wouldn't do anything for me, because he's a selfish jerk. A small voice at the back of my head tells me that he has no reason to help, I did just dump his ass, and I wasn't exactly nice about it. Fuck that. With my entire future hanging in the balance, I'm not in the mood to be reasonable.

Irritation bubbling through me, I turn back to my books. But I barely get halfway down the page before my mind wanders back to him again. What if he's on his way here right now? He might be just about to burst in through my door, kick the thing right off its hinges, and pin me down. He'd tear my clothes off as I tried to fight him, probably tie me to the bed. He might even have to gag me to stop the others from hearing my shouts for help. I glance over at my door as the ache inside me builds. It stays shut. I let out a very long sigh and scrub my hands over my face.

Can you hear yourself? What is wrong with me? Am I really fantasizing about that?

But the more I try to concentrate the more my mind wanders and the more my hunger grows. I'm like an addict, hooked from just one taste of a drug I never knew existed until a few days ago. And just like an addict, I can feel myself getting desperate. I need relief and there's only one place I can get it.

3

-MALCOLM-

I THROW the phone on the grass and stomp on it, channeling all of my frustration into the heel of my shoe. The screen shatters, and then the phone splinters into pieces, half embedded in the earth.

He's messing with my head. First, he spies on me, records me, tempts me with his flustered arousal. I gave him every opportunity to tap out last night, but he didn't. And then the next day, he doesn't want anything to do with me, he calls me crazy, looks at me like I'm a serial killer or something. And now? He wants to tempt me back again. Wants the cage that I just released him from. My cage. What does this mean?

My head can't take it. Why is he playing with me like this? Why is he tormenting me?

And why do I want him so badly?

I shout and kick the shattered pieces of my phone then set off again running, pushing myself hard as my legs eat up the dark ground. My limbs pump, my lungs heave.

It freaks me out that I'm having such a strong emotional reaction to him. Thinking about it logically, it's probably a good thing that he ended it now before I got in too deep. But who am I kidding? I already am. If this is how I feel after one day, I can't imagine what would happen if we'd lasted a week, a month, when he inevitably decided to fuck off.

I reach one end of the field and wheel around, sprinting off in the opposite direction.

What does he need my cage for anyway? He seemed desperate. Would it be so bad if I go and help him? Have just a little taste to help me quit. But no, that's a terrible idea. If I saw him now, I don't know how I'd react, I might lose control.

How can he have this kind of effect on me? It's scary. I need to go cold turkey. I need to stop seeing him entirely. I should quit the team. But at the moment it's the only release I have. I need the push, the strain of muscles, the sweat, and the clash of bodies to keep me in check.

My breath comes in ragged bursts, and I flick sweat out of my eyes.

I should go back to the club and restart with a nameless sub. I could find one with straw-blond hair and blue eyes. One with a big dumb smile. And I could wipe that smile away and make that face crease with pain and pleasure.

I push myself harder and harder, but it isn't working. The churning in my head isn't diminishing and I can feel everything thrumming inside me like a storm. It's building up and up. It's going to spill over.

My vision blurs. The packed grass under my feet loses focus. I blink hard and wetness trails down my cheeks.

Shit.

I clench my teeth in a grimace and keep on pushing through, until my airways are too blocked to breathe properly, and I have to stop and scrub furiously at my face.

Fuck you, I think. *Fuck you, asshole, you deserve this.*

"Hey!"

I spin.

Picked out by the light of the moon, his shadow cast long behind him, North is coming at me across the field.

4

-NORTH-

SOMEHOW, I knew he'd be on the field. Just like the first night I saw him, when he fell to his knees and started jerking off. My dick twitches at the memory. For a second, I hover at the edge of the field, watching his body move, and wonder if I should wait and watch in case he does it again. But my impatience wins out. I need it now and only his hands and body will do.

As I head toward him, a warm determined energy washes through me. The plan is to confront him in person and make him give me the damn cage. At least, that's what I've been telling myself on the way here.

From the way he's moving, the hard feral energy that powers his limbs, I can tell he's already on edge, and my heart speeds like I've been running too.

I'm halfway across the field when he stops. He looks like he's rubbing the sweat off his face in quick jerking movements.

"Hey!" I shout.

He spins toward me, and for a moment the moonlight catches on his face in a way that looks like there's tears on his cheeks, and his eyes are wide and wet. I hesitate.

But then his face narrows at my presence and I remember, this is Malcolm Blackwood. He doesn't have emotions. At least not ones that aren't anger. I doubt Mal even has tear ducts. It's just a trick of the light.

"What are you doing here?" he says as I get closer.

"You're being an asshole," I say, and my voice comes out surprisingly confrontational. It feels weird, it's not like me. It sounds more like his voice than my own.

"I don't have to give you what you want," he says.

Suddenly I don't want the cock cage anymore. Now that he's here in front of me, the fire inside rises up and demands so much more. This is fucked up, but I need it. I need him to act, I need the relief, I need to

get it out of my system, and then I can concentrate on work for real. My future depends on it. And hell, he deserves it.

I'm no good at this shit, so instead of trying to think of something else to say, I just let my body take over. I march right up to him. He frowns, unsure what's happening, and opens his mouth to speak. But before he can, I shove him hard in the chest with both hands. He stumbles backward, caught by surprise, and his eyes widen. Like rich bullies everywhere, I bet he's never had anyone stand up to him before. It makes me want to do it again, and fuck it, I do, crowding into his space and shoving him again as he stumbles backward.

That's enough time for him to pull himself together. His shock is replaced with real anger, and his face twists.

"Don't fucking touch me," he spits.

"Or what?" I say.

Still in his space, I go to shove him again. This time he knocks my hands away and shoves me back. A thrill shoots through me as his hands connect firmly with my chest, and I'm forced backward a few steps. There's that power. His body is so solid and strong. And I need more.

My blood rises, and with a surge of overwhelming feral energy, I lower my head and tackle him around the waist, driving the air out of him with my shoulder, and slamming him into the hard-packed ground. The thrill blasting through me is purely primal.

I land on top of him in a heap as he gasps, getting my arms locked around him. We wrestle on the ground, arms tight around each other, bodies pressed and rubbing, heaving muscle and grunted breaths. Fuck, it feels good. Then he twists, getting behind me so that his chest is to my back, and his arm snakes around my neck. He gets me in a chokehold, squeezing as the muscles of his forearm bulge, and my eyes go wide. The pressure cuts off my air. Pressure builds in my chest and my head, as I frantically slap and claw at his arm, all the while my dick fills out until it's rock-solid and throbbing. He holds the grip, and my mouth falls open. The corners of my vision go fuzzy and my chest burns for air. I'm stuck somewhere between panic and impossibly aroused. And each aborted heave of my lungs only coils the tension gathering in my core more and more.

Just when I feel like I'm about to pass out, he makes a noise, hot and shocked, and drops me. Then his body is gone from mine, and I gasp in ragged breaths and blink until I can see straight again. He's

standing a few feet away from me, hands clenched into fists, eyes wide, and pale in the night.

"Get away from me," he says. His voice is raw and dangerous.

I have no common sense, otherwise I'd back the fuck off this instant from the danger in his voice. Instead, I scramble up onto my feet, still dragging in breaths, hands on my thighs, and glare at him.

"Not until you fuck me, asshole," I pant.

His eyes manage to somehow get even wider. I run at him, although it's more like a stumble, and swing wildly for his face. It's clumsy and slow, so I expect him to duck out of the way, but he doesn't, and my fist connects with the side of his jaw with a meaty smack.

His head snaps to the side, and he gasps and staggers. When he turns back, dark hair disheveled and falling over his face, blood is sliding from his lips down his chin. Mouth open in shock, he touches the redness with stiff fingers and looks at it.

Did I really just do that? I feel as shocked as him as I shake my hand out, reeling. Shit. He's going to kill me. My body is never going to be found.

His eyes slide from the blood to my face, and the murderous intent in them is like a knife. I raise my hands.

"Shit. Malcolm, I—"

He launches himself at me, and in the collision, his mouth connects with mine. It's a solid smack of impact, crushing our lips together. Our teeth clash hard, rattling my head, which is still dizzy from being choked, and I nearly fall over. His breath is hot in my mouth. Then I'm kissing him back, violent and starving. My tongue plunges into him, tasting every part of him as I inhale desperately through my nose, taking in the smell of his blood and sweat and dark deliciousness. The kiss is everything I hoped it would be and more. It's the feeling when I score a touchdown and the crowd goes wild for me. It's the thrill of the chase, when the rival gives everything he has, and I beat him anyway. It's elation and it's primal and it's victory.

"Fuck me," I growl into his mouth. "Now."

Lips still fastened to mine, he pushes me. It's only when I feel the wood of the bleachers at the back of my legs that I realize how far we've moved. Somehow, we're at the edge of the field now. It throws my balance off and I end up on my back over it and he follows me down.

He breaks the kiss. My lips feel raw and wet. He tears my sweatpants down and the cold air brushes on my cock. I gasp.

Moving too quickly for me to keep up, he pins me in place with his chest against mine using his full body weight, plunges two fingers into my mouth, and then shoves them between my cheeks.

There's no pause. They plunge inside me. I hiss in a breath as they thrust and twist and stretch me. I almost want him to just go in hard and fast now, but I'll regret it as soon as I've come and can't sit right for a week.

The fingers pull out and I make a noise of frustration at my suddenly empty hole. But he ignores it and pulls my sweatpants all the way off. Then he flips me over so I'm face down on the bench, my dick trapped painfully between my belly and the hard wood of the bleacher. He wrenches my arms up behind my back and fastens them together, wrapping the legs of my pants around my wrists and tying them tight. I groan into the wood.

His fingers come back down between my cheeks and he's inside me again, plunging and thrusting. I shove my hips against him in little movements, trying to take him in deeper so he can hit my sweet spot. I ache for him to be inside me already.

"Fuck me," I gasp. "Come on."

"Shut up."

"I need it. Now."

He flips me back over, my arms twisted awkwardly beneath me, and clamps his hand down over my mouth, pressing down hard. My lips pull and snag against my teeth and I taste the tang of his skin between my parted lips.

"I said shut the fuck up, Nolan."

The sound of my own snarled name on his lips while he's dominating me is enough to make me shudder pathetic needy sounds against his hand. My hands twist. I want to grab him and force him in deeper, but I can't. I have to take what he gives me, and that just turns me on even more.

"Fuck your hole is greedy." His voice is strained and wobbly. It's taking a lot for him to keep hold of himself. I wish he wouldn't bother.

One more twist and another finger pushes into my hole, stretching me more, and I relish the burn. He works me open a little longer, and then pulls out.

My cock is standing up between us, already weeping precum. Mal swipes across the slit with his thumb, making my hips jump at the contact, and adds it to the spit that slicks my hole. It's not much, but it'll have to do.

One hand still smothering my mouth, he heaves my legs onto his shoulders so that the head of his cock brushes my ass. My body moves, tries to wriggle down toward it, desperate to get it inside me.

But I don't need to bother. He wastes no time lining himself up, hot and hard against my hole. In the haze of my dizzy mind, a small voice tells me to relax, open up, take what's coming, and I try.

There is sweet pressure, a thrust, the start of a burn, and then my whole body goes rigid as he pushes inside me. With a deep grunt, he loses his hold on himself and bottoms out in one movement, filling me to the brim with his cock. My legs straighten on his shoulders, toes curling, my eyes jump wide, my breath catches in my nose. But even as my body screams, I moan as a filthy terrible pleasure swallows me.

Fuck yes. Yes.

This is what I need. This is what I've been starving for. The feeling lights up my veins like the best hit I've ever had. Is this how junkies feel?

His length pulls out of me, dragging over every single nerve in my sensitive asshole as it goes. I shift and squirm. He spits, smearing his saliva with his fingers around my hole to slick it more. After a breath, he drives back in deep and hard, one hand holding my hip, the other clamping down over my mouth to smother the noises I'm trying to make. I moan at how impossibly full I am.

"Shut up, you fucking slut," he hisses, and his harsh words only make me moan more. I am a slut, a slut for him and no one else. No one else knows my dirty secret.

As he picks up the pace, words tumble out between his gasped breaths like he can't stop them.

"You fucking . . . golden boy . . . you're nothing but a . . . slut. Begging for me to . . . fuck you hard. Is this . . . what you want . . . Nolan? You want to . . . squirm on my . . . dick. *Fuck*."

I'm nodding under his hand, head rolling back and forth, eager and uncaring. Yes, yes. I am. Yes, please do. Yes, I want it. I'd be rambling if he wasn't gagging me.

My body jolts with each thrust. Then his cock catches the sweet spot deep inside me, and I shudder as bolts of electricity shoot through

my core.

His face creases as his slams in hard, moving faster and faster until he loses his rhythm. His mouth falls open and he groans as he releases inside me, filling me more. The tensed lines of his body and neck stand out and he grits his teeth as he stutters, “Fuck. Fuck. Fuck,” as he unloads his hot cum into me.

I’m at snapping point already, the tension in my belly wound so tight I can’t hold still. I buck my hips, fucking myself on his spilling cock. His cum slicks my hole and makes the length inside me slippery, while my own waves luridly in the air.

With a muffled cry I tip over the edge. Cum spills up my stomach and across my chest in spurts of heat. I moan and whimper under his hand as I crest on my orgasm, writhing as each wave of pleasure rolls through me. Before I’m done, he collapses over me, bending me in half with his cock still inside. He pants into my ear, and the hand over my mouth goes limp. I take his fingers into my mouth and suck on them, making loud obscene slurps as my cock continues to spill in waves between us. Then finally, I finish. My head falls back against the bench, limp and fuzzy.

“Fuck,” he murmurs again.

We stay here, breathing heavily, his body warming mine with his tacky skin as we both get our breath back. I let out a lungful of air that I feel like I’ve been holding since he took the cock cage off.

Yeah. Fuck.

5

-MALCOLM-

SHIT.

WHAT just happened?

The fog of arousal clears from my brain and I blink, disoriented, like I've just woken up from a fever dream. The warm skin of North's throat presses against my face, clammy with sweat and smelling far too good. The rapid tap of his heartbeat pulses against my cheekbone. I don't think I've ever been this intimately close to someone before and it makes my chest feel warm and fluttery at the same time. I don't like it.

Breathing hard, I pull my face away and look down at North under me. He's breathing hard, too, his face blissed out and his eyes heavy. My eyes trail down his body, over the rucked-up shirt around his shoulders, his cum smeared chest, his dick resting against his thigh, to where I'm entering him with my own softening cock.

My stomach clenches. I don't know if I should be relieved or angry. Now that my head isn't filled with hazy lust, I grasp what just happened here. He *pushed* me to fuck him on purpose, just when I was trying to quit him. He made me have another taste, and now that I have, I don't know if I can stop. Because I already want more of him. I want all of him.

I pull out, feeling numb.

"What the fuck was that?" I say.

He smirks lazily. Fuck, he looks infuriatingly good all blissed out like this. "You weren't going to help me. So I had to take matters into my own hands."

"By making me fuck you?" Because that's what happened isn't it? He pushed me until I lost control of myself. Pulled my strings like a fucking expert puppet master. Under that dopey grin and those puppy dog eyes, he's not as innocent as he appears. I'd be impressed if it wasn't so fucking terrifying. Am I really that easy to read and manipulate?

I step back, letting his legs fall, and he heaves himself up into a sitting position, his arms still tied behind him. Reaching around, I yank the sweatpants loose so his arms come free, and throw them back to him. Blood smears his lips and chin, but I don't remember biting him or anything. Did I lose control so much that I did and don't remember? I feel like the ground has shifted under my feet.

"Did I hurt you?" I ask. I don't want to care, but I fucking do.

He grins, and wipes at the blood on his mouth. "Just enough. But this isn't mine, it's yours."

Oh, that's right, he punched me in the face. As I think about it my jaw starts to throb.

"Why did you do that?" I ask.

"Punch you?"

"Make me fuck you."

"I told you, I need to concentrate," he says. "And you weren't going to help me out."

Is it just me, or is this not making any kind of sense? He came out here, attacked me, and made me fuck him rough over the bleachers because he couldn't get his mind on track to finish his fucking homework? After telling me earlier in no uncertain words that he didn't want anything to do with me? Anger starts to flare, heating my chest.

"Bullshit," I snap. "You just want to mess with me."

He stands up and starts to pull his sweatpants on, sliding them up his sweat and cum stained thighs. It only just occurs to me that he isn't wearing underwear. He really planned this, didn't he?

"Honestly," he says. "I'm sorry, but I had to."

He *had* to? Yeah, bullshit. There's more to this. Deep down, part of me is hoping it's because he needs me as much as I need him, and part of me is afraid of that. If he sought me out because he regrets breaking it off . . . I can't accept that he just wanted to cum so that he could clear his head and study.

"Tell me what you really want," I say.

He sighs and finishes rearranging his clothes. "I'm failing. Ok?"

I blink at him. "Failing what?"

"College." He glances up at me. "I've fallen behind. The professor called me into his office today, I failed another test. One more and I'm out."

"Out?"

"They'll kick me out of college."

My eyes widen. “Did he actually say that?”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

Yet again I feel the ground shifting beneath my feet. My mind races. How did this happen? In a flash I see him squirming as I make the butt plug vibrate in class. My vicious pleasure at being responsible for keeping him awake all night. The text messages and the paper, pulling him out of class to confront him. I’ve been so hungry for his attention that I’ve been pulling it away from everything else. He’s going to get kicked out, and it’s my fault.

And if North gets kicked out . . . I won’t be able to see him. I won’t have access to him. Only a moment ago I was considering cutting him out of my life like a tumor. But the thought that it actually might happen for real is just *unacceptable*.

I’m surprised by how upset it makes me. But it’s not because I need him. I just like having nice things. That’s all it is. And North is a nice thing that I want very much.

No. I can’t allow it.

“That’s not going to happen,” I say.

He looks at me, confused. “What?”

My mind races. Yes, I can make this work, and I can get exactly what I want from it without opening myself up, no emotional attachment. The ground stops moving. I’m finally getting my control back, everything’s slipping back into place. I smile.

North’s watching me with those wide blue eyes, his blond hair wild.

“I’ll make you a deal,” I say. “I’ll help you with your grades, I’ll make sure you pass. And you give me what I want.”

He eyes me warily. “What do you want?”

“You. I want all of you. Anywhere, and anytime I want.”

6

-NORTH-

THE MOONLIGHT glints off Mal's face, and I can't help but feel like I'm making a deal with the devil. My heart flips.

"What do you mean?" I breathe.

"Exactly that. You'll do what I say when I say it. No questions. I'll discipline you when you fail and reward you when you earn it. And in return, I will make you get the best fucking grades you've ever had."

"How?" I imagine him somehow getting the professors and exam boards to manipulate my grades. He doesn't have that kind of power, does he? Would he bribe them? "I don't want to get in trouble for anything illegal."

"You won't."

I study him. Do I make a deal with the devil? Everything inside me is telling me it's a very bad idea. Which is kinda funny considering I just hunted him down for a rough fuck like a starving addict.

But what was I planning to happen next? That he'd fuck me once, cure me with the power of his dick, and I'd magically be able to concentrate for the rest of the year? Now that I can think clearly again, that's kinda embarrassing. Or maybe I thought I could make this a regular thing, pick a fight with him and push him into fucking me once every few days. Yeah, maybe not.

He's watching me closely; he's got that predator look back in his eyes again.

Maybe I *do* need him to control me, I obviously have no clue how to run my own life. And what other choice do I have? I can't get kicked out.

Shit. I gulp and close my eyes briefly.

"Ok."

He studies my face, looking for the lie. Then the corner of his lip curls up on one side. It makes me shudder, and not entirely in a bad way.

He holds his hand out for me to shake and I snort.

“Really?” I say. “We’re gonna shake on it?”

“We’re going to do it properly this time. Do we have an agreement?”

He keeps holding it out, so I take it and shake, like we’re businessmen finishing an acquisition, and not a failing college student agreeing to become the devil’s fucktoy. Why is that so thrilling?

The grip is tight on my hand.

“Let’s get started.”

***

“Are the chains really necessary?” I flex my wrist and the metal clinks. The padded leather cuffs are loose enough to be comfortable, but tight enough so I can’t slip my hands out. And of course, they’re locked with a key that Mal tucks into his pocket.

“Yes,” he says behind me.

I feel utterly ridiculous chained completely butt naked to the desk in his plush living room, with my books spread out in front of me. The cock cage is back on but thankfully he hasn’t made me put the butt plug in; that definitely would have been too distracting. I shift again, but it’s impossible to hide the full-body blush I have going on like this.

I have to admit this isn’t what I was expecting.

He comes up behind me, takes my jaw in his hand, and directs me to the book open in front of me.

“Read this page, and then summarize it. I’ll check it over to make sure it’s good enough. If it is, I’ll reward you. If it isn’t.” He runs the slim leather paddle up my back, making my skin tingle. “You get punished. So, you better do a good job.”

My cock swells valiantly inside the cage, pushing against the bars. Fuck, how did he manage to make studying hot?

He sets a timer on the desk next to me. “You have fifteen minutes. Start now.”

My heart skips. This is so surreal, how the hell am I supposed to study like this? I’m fidgety and aroused and feel vulnerable as hell. But the timer ticks down, and I need to try. I read, attempting to take in as much info as I can, but I feel stupid—too self-conscious to concentrate. I shouldn’t be doing this, it’s not the kind of thing popular football stars do. The timer goes off before I’ve even finished reading the page.

Mal looks over my shoulder. “That’s disappointing. I’m going to have to punish you now.”

“But—”

“Bend over.”

He pulls me up by the scruff of my neck and pushes me so I’m bent over the desk with my ass in the air. The bare skin of my chest sticks to the pages of my textbook, and the metal cage clinks against the desk as the edge cuts into my thighs.

CRACK

The paddle slaps across the meat of my ass. I hiss and jerk against the desk as the short sharp shock of pain flares across my cheeks. As the sting fades the pain edges into pleasure, and I bite my lip.

He lets me up, sits me back on the stool, and resets the timer.

“Start again.”

God, this pushy strict teacher vibe he’s giving off is sexy as hell. My dick lifts its head in the cage hopefully. The chains clink as I rub my eyes and try again. The words filter in a little more this time, but I can’t get over the embarrassment. I’m extremely aware of my naked butt on his expensive chair.

When the timer goes off, I still haven’t finished the page. He tuts, bends me over the desk, and spanks me again. I let out a slight whimper as the pain flares through my ass and I flush hot all over. My cock twitches, again, unable to do much about it.

“Start again.”

Again and again, I fail, each time getting a slap on the ass. And each time I get more turned on and humiliated by my own stupidity. Finally, I sit back in the chair and clench my hands on the desk.

“Dammit, I can’t do this. I’m never going to catch up,” I say. “I’m an idiot. I don’t know why I’m even taking this class—”

Suddenly, his fingers clamp around my jaw and jerk my head so I’m looking up into his furious face.

“Shut the fuck up, North, you’re not an idiot. You’re fucking smart if you’d just take the time and effort to let yourself realize it.”

I stare at him. His deep-brown eyes are heated. I always thought they were almost black, but now I can see that they’re warm with flashes of amber radiating out from the center. I’ve been staring at him a whole lot in the past week, how did I never notice that before?

“Thanks,” I say.

He straightens and drops my face. His jaw tightens and he looks away slightly like he just said something embarrassing. Again, I wonder if he actually likes me or not. Why is he so hard to figure out?

I expect him to shrug it off and get back to what we were doing, but instead, he drags his eyes back to me and looks at me for a long moment. It feels like the air is being drawn out of the room.

"You have no idea how frustrating it is seeing you waste your natural skills. You can do this, there's no question. But you need to learn self-discipline," he says, still looking awkward. "Stop worrying about everything else, clear your mind, and just do it. Because I know that you can."

I blink. I don't know what to say.

He clears his throat. "Now start again."

This time I try to concentrate less on how stupid and horny I feel, how dumb I am, and more on the words on the page. I make it to the bottom of the page and manage to write out a few sentences of summary before the timer goes off.

Mal looks at it, his lips pursed. I search his face for any kind of approval.

"Good. That's better."

That small bit of praise makes me beam. But my glow of pride is interrupted when he pulls me up and bends me over the desk.

CRACK

I gasp at the pain. "Hey!" I say. What was that for?

"You can do better," he says, coolly.

I grumble to myself as he resets the timer yet again, even as the glow of his words warms my chest. It's barely anything really, but from him? It's like a standing ovation.

We do it again, and again, and each time I get better and better. Although apparently not enough. Finally, he looks at my work and simply says, "Good."

I get to my feet automatically, ready for the punishment, but instead, he pushes me back into my seat. Pressed against my back, he reaches over my shoulder. I jerk as he slides his hand down my chest and circles my nipple with a finger, the soft bud instantly standing to attention at his touch as my skin shivers. God that feels good. He slides his hand lower, over my abs, until he's skimming over the sensitive skin of my inner thighs. I gasp at the exquisite feeling, wanting him to linger

there, but craving more. Compared to the harsh smack of the paddle, it's pure bliss.

The touch moves, and my breath catches in my chest as it glides along the length of my caged cock, stroking my sensitive flesh between the bars. Oh fuck. It's the best thing I've ever felt. I lean back into the warmth of his body, unable to keep still as I twitch and groan, and my hungry cock tries to fill. My hands fist on the desk in front of me, my need coiling deep inside like a living thing.

Then, he takes his hand away and I whimper as he turns the paper of the textbook.

"Next page."

Shit, I'm already panting. His touch was like the best drug—I've never actually tried any, but if they make you feel anything like that, sign me up—sending sparkling lines across my skin. And now I want to do so fucking well for him, so he'll do it again. The paddle is hot, I can't lie, but that was one hundred times better. I lean back over the book, eager to consume the information.

The next few times I get the paddle. My work isn't good enough, and I push harder. I want that reward so bad. I work on clearing my head, concentrating on the page in front of me. It takes me less attempts this time to do well enough to get the reward. I close my eyes as his fingers glide over me, sending shivers to every single nerve in my body, and I groan and move my hips, trying desperately to get hard inside the cage.

Fuck. I'm addicted to that touch. I'd do anything for it at this point. It ends far too quickly, and I bend over my book.

Time passes quickly in a blur of reading and touching, alternating between the smack of the paddle and his blissful hand. It gets to the point that I'm excited to read because it means the reward is coming. I've lost all track of time when Malcolm finishes giving me my reward, and instead of resetting the timer, he removes the cuffs from my wrists.

"Oh, are we done?" I ask.

As he releases each of my hands, he rubs firmly where the cuffs have left faint red marks around my wrists. I hold very still, barely daring to breathe, and watch his fingers work over my skin. They don't hurt but the rubbing feels good, and it feels like if I move, I might scare him off like some skittish animal. It reminds me of the time I spent ages trying to befriend a stray cat, the excited tension when he finally took some food out of my hand and let me pet him. This new Mal isn't

exactly caring, he carries everything out in an efficient, businesslike way, but I like him a lot more than “here’s your clothes, now get out” Mal.

He stands me up and bends me over the desk again, and I comply, not wanting to break this strange new spell. Am I getting one last spank?

I’m expecting the crack of leather and the sting of the paddle. But instead, there’s the pop of a bottle cap, and warm firm hands rubbing warm lotion over my ass, soothing the sting. What the hell? But fuck it feels so good.

I’m so surprised that the words come out of my mouth without thinking.

“What are you doing?”

“It’s called aftercare,” he says stiffly.

“Yeah, I know, but, why are you doing it?”

Shut up, shut up, you’re going to scare him off. Just enjoy it.

His hands work in smooth circles across my aching muscles. “It’s an important part of the practice. To prevent injury or lasting damage.” He sounds like he’s reading from an instruction booklet—*How to Dom Your Straight(ish) Teammate Who You Might Or Might Not Hate*.

“You didn’t do it last time.” Oh my god shut up.

His hands pause for a moment. “Do you want me to stop?”

“No! No, I’m just . . . ” *What? Oddly touched?* “Curious.”

“I didn’t follow the proper procedure last time. It was a mistake. We’re doing it properly this time.”

Again, I frown into the desktop. Is that . . . an apology? I’m not sure, but I’m taking it as one anyway.

He finishes and gives me my clothes back, along with a bottle of water and an oat cereal bar.

“Have these. We’ll continue tomorrow. Now go home and get some sleep. I’m leaving the cage on so you can’t pleasure yourself. You only get that from me, and only if you work hard. Understand?” I nod dumbly, and he carries on. “Each session I’ll give you longer to read more pages and write longer paragraphs in one go, and the punishments and rewards will increase in intensity accordingly.”

He waits for me to acknowledge that I understand what’s happening.

“Then I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I get dressed in a daze. Afterward, I go back to the dorm, feeling a whole lot of things whirling around in my head all the way. But what outweighs the rest is an overwhelming sense of relief. I flop down onto my bed and stare at the ceiling, trying to process it all.

My re-sit is in one week, I'm nervous, yeah, but I can't help the weirdly calm feeling that with Mal in charge, I'm gonna be ok. The crushing weight that has been pressing down on my shoulders ever since I stepped out of Professor Halloway's office has lifted. It's out of my hands now; all I have to do is follow Mal's instructions.

It's weirdly freeing.

I roll over, close my eyes, and sleep like a baby.

7

-NORTH-

THE CAGE stays on all the next day, even during football practice, and I feel oddly collected. Focused. Calm. Afterward, on the way back to the locker room, Coach slaps a hand on my shoulder, beaming.

"It's good to see you back on form, North! I was starting to worry you were losing your edge." Over his shoulder, Malcolm locks eyes with me and nods subtly, and warmth spreads through my chest.

I smile at Coach and get changed in the shower stall so no one sees the cage.

When I get out, Mal is waiting for me in a fresh set of black clothes that show off the shape of his body and the length of his muscular legs. He takes me back to his place, strips me naked and chains me to the desk.

"You have half an hour, and I want two pages. Go."

He sets the timer and steps back, taking a seat in a deep armchair, crossing one long leg over the other. I glance around the room and shift in my seat, feeling the hot prickle of embarrassment again. Malcolm isn't looking at me, though, he picks up a book and flicks through it lazily, scanning the pages with heavy-lidded eyes. I watch him for a moment. He looks so at ease, so calm, the tightness that always grips his wide shoulders has melted away. And it makes me feel calmer, too, somehow. I turn my attention back to the page of text in front of me and start to read.

There's nothing to distract me, no phone, no laptop, no internet. The cuffs restrain me, keeping me here until Mal decides to release me. There's nothing I can do but accept it. Gradually the embarrassment leaves me, and I relax back into my chair. Being naked and chained starts to feel kinda . . . normal. I don't know if that's a good thing or not, but once I let myself give in to it and ignore the thoughts that I shouldn't be doing this, the words soak in, and I write my summaries.

Mal reads my summaries and either punishes me or rewards me, and I no longer fight against it. I take what I'm given in the knowledge

that it is out of my control, and probably for my own good. Mal seems to know what he's doing, he's in charge now.

While I study, he leaves the room a few times; he brings me a drink, a snack, and gets a new book for himself. But even when he isn't in the room, I can still feel his presence hovering over me, controlling me. And fuck I feel *comfortable*. Is this what brainwashing feels like? I try not to think about it too much. I can worry about my identity crisis after my grades are back where they should be.

***

As the days pass, I get fewer punishments and more rewards, and I fall into the rhythm of our agreement. Classes, practice, study, sleep. Malcolm is stern, cool. Not really kind, but also not cruel. He's fallen into this dynamic as comfortably as I have. And I'm not sure if I should find that worrying or not, so I just don't think about it.

But it's not all study. Malcolm makes sure that both sides of the agreement are held. Throughout the week, at any time of the day—except during classes—I get the order; it could be a text, a look, a spoken word, anything. And I'm his. I don't get a say in it.

On Wednesday in bio, the professor asks a question to the class, and I'm surprised to find I know the answer. The professor looks pleasantly surprised, too, when I offer it, and a moment later, my phone vibrates.

Psycho: Go to the sports equipment closet after class.

My heart speeds in anticipation. Once the class is over, I follow his instructions, and he's waiting for me there.

"On your knees," he says.

I kneel in front of him, trying not to fidget as adrenaline shoots through my body. His fingers tangle in my hair and tilt my head back.

"You did well today. Most of the class didn't know the answer to that question."

I'm not supposed to speak unless he asks me a question, so I just gaze up at him, chewing on the inside of my cheek. Is he going to reward me?

He moves around behind me and crouches.

“Hold onto the shelf in front of you. Keep your hands there. I don’t want you to let go.”

I raise my arms and grip onto the edge of the metal shelf. When my arms are in place, he reaches around and starts to undo my fly. It all feels so naughty. I hold still and he opens them and pulls my pants down far enough to take my cock out. I close my eyes briefly, enjoying the sensation, but they snap open when I hear a metallic click. Malcolm has slotted the key into my cock cage and works it lose. He’s taking it off, which means he’s going to let me come.

“Not until I say you can,” he says, and I’m so dizzy with excitement I think he’s read my mind. His fingers press at my mouth, and I part my lips to let them in, sucking on his fingers eagerly. When they’re slick with spit, he pulls them out and drags his hand up the length of my stiffening cock. It feels so good that a groan escapes me before I can stop it. His hand clamps down over my mouth, muffling me, and I close my eyes again, keeping my grip on the shelf. Being controlled like this, grabbed and manhandled, is beyond hot. Between that and the edging I’ve had all week, it’s not going to take long for me to finish.

He jerks my dick roughly, breathing into the side of my neck. My head flops backward onto his shoulder, tugged back by the hand on my mouth. My fingers dig into the metal of the shelf as pleasure makes my body writhe. Each tug on my cock drives me closer and closer to the edge until I’m thrusting into his hand with frantic energy and whining against his palm. I want to grab hold of him, feel his body, but if I move my hands he might punish me, or worse, he might stop.

“You’ve been such a good boy this week,” he murmurs into my ear, before taking the fleshy lobe between his teeth and biting down hard.

I snatch in a stuttered breath through my nose as my whole body tenses, my balls tighten, and I release. His hand keeps pumping me, not relenting at all as my orgasm rolls over my twitching muscles, and I spill over his hand onto the concrete floor of the closet.

I collapse back against him, still held in place and obediently gripping onto the shelf, and shudder as the last of my cum dribbles out. He lets go of my mouth, wiping my saliva on the leg of my pants. Then he releases my dick and, still reaching around from behind me, reattaches the cock cage over it. I watch his hands, between my raised arms, as they move over my cock and slip it back into place. His other hand comes to my lips, wet with my cum.

“Clean it off.”

Oh god. I moan in my throat, and I lick my cum from his fingers, tasting my own salty tang on my tongue.

"Good." He stands, entirely unruffled, not a hair out of place, and looks down at me on the floor, cum stained and panting, still clinging to the shelf like my life depends on it. "You can let go now."

***

I'm alone in the room, apart from the professor sitting quietly behind his desk. The only noise is the clock ticking on the wall. I scan the paper in front of me. This is it. This is what I've been working all week toward, this is what all those spankings were for. The cock cage sits snug under my pants, keeping my dick restrained, under control.

The professor glances at the clock and clears his throat. "Ok, North, you have one hour. Please start."

OK. I can do this. Mal says I can do this, and I do whatever Mal says, so that means I can. But what if I can't? What if I fail again? A spike of anxiety goes through me. If I fuck this up that's it, end of the road. I take a deep breath. No, I can't psych myself out now. I concentrate and imagine Mal standing behind me with the timer, the cuffs on my wrists, keeping me grounded in the moment. Hell, I even imagine myself butt naked. Thank god telepathy isn't a real thing, or Halloway would have some very uncomfortable questions for me.

The anxiety settles. I start. All I have to do is what Mal has trained me to do in the past week. I regurgitate the information, analyze, expand, and define. It flows surprisingly easily, my confidence builds, and I write furiously, the scratch of pen on paper loud.

When it's done, I put my pen down and sit back with a release of breath. Well, that's it. I'm done. Now that it's over I let myself feel the nerves again in full force.

The professor grades my paper there and then, nodding his head as his pen skips down the page, bobbing with growing enthusiasm. I watch, fidgeting.

"This is much better, North! It's not the best mark, but you're well above the pass level." He smiles at me as I sag in relief. I've done it, I'm safe. I'm so relived I almost melt into a puddle on the floor. "I'll admit you've surprised me. What's your secret?"

Malcolm Blackwood is my secret. Oh, and I'm wearing a cock cage right now. I stifle a grin at the thought and shrug innocently. Somehow, I don't think he'll want to hear that answer.

"I'm learning some self-discipline." Which is true enough, I guess.

He smiles widely. "Well, you've really turned it around. Well done and keep it up."

Oh, I intend to. I feel giddy, I want to go find Mal and jump on him and kiss his stern face. Because, fuck, it actually worked.

But I've passed now, what does that mean for our deal? I frown. Do we keep going, or was it only a temporary thing? We didn't agree on how long we'd keep this arrangement going for. My relief at my victory stales slightly. Now that he's had me for a week, is he going to stop? He got what he wanted for a while, what if he's tired of me now?

My phone vibrates, setting off a swarm of butterflies in my stomach. Speak of the devil.

Psycho: Well? Did you pass?

I really need to change his contact name. I go for a casual response, like I wasn't shitting myself.

Me: Yep

I add a smiley, delete it, then add it again. Then tell myself to stop being stupid and just send it. I wait for his response, almost as nervous as I was for the exam itself.

Psycho: Come here.

My heart leaps. He doesn't have to tell me twice, the thought of being rewarded has me jumping inside like a touch-starved puppy. I run.

8

-NORTH-

“IT’S TIME for your reward.”

Mal stands in his doorway, leaning one solid shoulder against the frame. His body is loose, hips jutted to one side. I bubble with anticipation on his front mat, breathing heavily from speeding over here, my bike thrown on the ground behind me with one wheel still spinning. I have no idea what he has in store for me, and I can’t fucking wait to find out.

He steps back and lets me in, and I jump after him. But he doesn’t let me any further. He cages me against the door with his arms and uses me to push it closed. His smell envelops me; clean, some cologne, and that dark Malcolm-ness that makes my mind lose track of what’s going on. I take a deep lungful of it. I worked hard for this, and I’m going to enjoy every single second of it. Especially if this is the last time.

He’s not much taller than me, but enough for me to have to look up at his face this close. He expression is somewhere between cold contempt at my neediness, and pure animal hunger, and it shoots straight to my cock.

“Get on your knees,” he says, his voice low, commanding. A shiver runs through me as I lower myself obediently, bringing my face level with his crotch, where I get a front row seat for the bulge he’s sporting there. My mouth waters for a taste, but I keep my hands and my mouth to myself, waiting for his next instruction.

See, I’m good, I say with my eyes. See how good I am?

The corner of his mouth quirks for a second before he straightens it again. But I saw it. He likes it. And that’s just as arousing as his cock inches from my lips. He leans over and picks something from the table beside the door. A loop of leather. His long fingers loosen the shiny golden buckle, and my chest tightens as I realize it’s a collar. He’s going to collar me and shit, I’d be rock hard right now if I wasn’t wearing this cage. My balls already ache from my straining cock.

He fastens it around my neck, the stiff leather snug against my skin. I swallow and feel the way my throat moves against it. God damn, it feels so kinky, so dirty, so amazingly, deliciously wrong.

He clips a golden chain to a ring set in the collar and steps back, giving it a tug toward the hallway entrance.

"Come."

I start to climb to my feet. He grips my jaw with his fingers, digging in hard.

"I didn't say you could get up. Crawl," he growls, and my dick twitches and aches against the metal bars of the cage.

Keeping my eyes on his face, I get back down on my knees, and he tugs the leash again. Face red hot, I crawl behind him like a dog as he leads down the hallway.

He takes me into a back room that I haven't seen before. It's dark, and I have to blink my eyes until I can see again. All the surfaces are a rich dark color, it's warm, almost cozy, with a wide, low couch on one side, a table, and a sort of padded area on the wall. It doesn't look like any kind of room I've ever been in before. Blame my slow brain on the insane level of arousal raging through me right now, because it's only when I notice metal rings set into the wall and ceiling that things start to click into place.

Wait . . . is this . . . a sex dungeon?

Although it's less like a dungeon and more like a den. His sex den then? Malcolm has a sex den? The thought really shouldn't surprise me as much as it does.

My eyes snap to Malcolm in front of me, my heart beating like crazy. He's watching me, waiting for my reaction, and whatever he sees in my face, he likes it. His eyes narrow. He leads me further in and stops by the table. Down here on my knees all I can see is the underside of it.

"You've been so good, I thought I'd let you see the tools I'm going to use on you before I start." He gives the leash a tug. "Stand."

On the table, laid out like a kinky buffet, is a selection of toys that make a shiver shoot up my spine; a bright red ball gag, a set of small shiny metal clamps tethered by a thin chain, a black ridged dildo, rope, and a metal bar with leather cuffs attached to each end. I swallow and my dick presses against its cage.

He lets me get a good look at the items that he's going to use on me, watching me closely, drinking in my reaction, before he tugs me

down.

"That's enough. On your knees." He takes a seat, and I get down, taking my place between his legs. His muscular thighs cage me as he strokes across my hair and down the side of my face, along my jaw.

"You've been a good boy, Nolan." He tilts his head. "Do you want your reward?"

"Yes. Please," I say, breathy with arousal.

"It's going to hurt," he says, rubbing his thumb over my lips. "Do you understand?"

"Y-yes." My breath shudders as I part my lips, allowing him access.

"What do you do if you want to stop?" He takes his fingers out, allowing me to answer.

"I say the safeword."

"Which is?"

I don't want to say it, but he's asked me a direct question. I have to remind myself that it's just a gut reaction. He's not going to stop now. "Baseball."

He nods, then slips his fingers back into my mouth, and the tightness in my chest eases. He pushes in further until they brush against the back of my mouth and my throat constricts automatically, and hmms to himself.

"Let's get started." He leads me to the wall and unclips the lead. "Up. Put your hands out in front of you."

I follow his instructions.

He takes the rope from the table and ties my hands together, looping the rope around my wrists, binding them firmly together. After checking if it's too tight, he loops a rope through a metal ring in the wall above my head, makes a pulley, and attaches it to the bound wrists. Then he pulls. My arms rise above my head until they're stretched out. This is already way kinkier than anything I've ever done before, my heart is already tripping over itself.

"Snap your fingers," he says, and I blink at him, confused. He raises an eyebrow and I remind myself—do as Mal says, no questions. I snap them, making a loud click. He nods.

"That's your new safe signal when you have a gag in." My already light head spins at the thought of being gagged. Fuck. New kink unlocked. "Snap, and we stop immediately. Understand?"

I nod. I wouldn't have even considered that. Good thing one of us knows what he's doing.

The gag drags on the table as he picks it up and my hairs stand on end. I've never worn one before, but apparently I want to.

"You can never shut the fuck up when I work on you, and I don't want to punish you today, because you did so well. So, I'm going to shut you up myself." He raises the gag. "Open your mouth."

He puts the ball gag into my mouth and fastens the leather straps around the back of my head. My tongue runs across the smooth surface of the ball that stretches my mouth wide, holding my jaw open. I draw wavering air through my nose and pin pricks of sweat prickle across my skin. Oh fuck. Why do I like this so much?

"That's better."

He strips me, slowly. He pulls my shirt up and hooks it over my head, so it's bunched around my shoulders, exposing the stretch of my chest and torso. Then he pops open the fly of my pants and slides them down my thighs. Being slowly exposed while I'm tied up like this is doing things to me; I'm so aroused I feel high. The cock cage is tucked inside the fabric of my underwear. He traces the line of it with his finger and I twitch.

My pants drop to pool around my ankles and then he hooks his fingers into the waistband of my boxers and eases them down a fraction at a time. It's torturously slow, and I can tell he's enjoying teasing me. My waistband gets to the top of the cage, so low on my hips that my pubic hair moves with his breath, and he lingers there for a second before removing his fingers. I let out a noise that he ignores. Bastard. He goes down to my feet, pulls off my shoes and socks one at a time, and tugs my pants all the way off.

I'm on the cusp of nakedness, dangling by a thread. He steps back and takes me in, his eyes cool and disinterested. I know it's an act, I can see the bulge in his pants that betrays his interest, but it makes me feel so powerless and vulnerable, like a specimen about to be taken apart. A plaything of no consequence to be used and discarded as he pleases. It makes me ache deep inside with humiliated arousal.

With a sudden jerk he pulls my boxers all the way down, and I'm fully naked, stretched out on the wall. I shudder. He returns to the table and picks up the small clamps held together by a chain. Where the fuck are they supposed to go?

He licks his finger and rubs it over my nipples, massaging until the soft buds harden. Oh, that's where they go. The rubbing feels good, but do I like nipple play? I guess I'm about to find out. He closes the clamp

around my nipples, and I whimper as the sensation shoots straight to my dick. Ok, yes, I do like nipple play. He tugs on the chain once, increasing the sensation and my hips roll in response. Shit, how am I into so many things I never knew about?

Mal flips me around so that I'm pressed against the wall and leans his full weight against my back. The course material of his pants rubs against my skin, and he squeezes both my ass cheeks hard. I yelp. Then he slaps them with the flat of his palm, so hard the sting makes my back arch, pushing against him as I groan at the sweet pain. I've never enjoyed pain this much before Mal started to do it. He does it again and again, until my skin is prickly and hot all over, my eyes water and my dick aches. Goddamn his hands feel so good on me.

A click. The ooze of lube. My body reacts to the sound, stomach fluttering. It means something's going inside me. A moment later he dips his slick fingers between my cheeks and trails down my crack until he finds what he's looking for and swirls lube around my asshole. The thrill of arousal shoots through me, tightening my muscles. I try to relax as his finger presses against my hole. But as they slip slowly inside with no friction, dragging against the rim of muscle, it sends a tingling jolt through me that feels so good I can't stop myself from clenching around it.

"Hungry boy," he growls into my ear. "You've been waiting for this, haven't you? Fantasizing about me fucking you while your dick tries to get hard. You want it so bad."

Does he want me to reply? To agree? Because I will, it's true. Leaning against me harder, pinning me in place, he plunges his finger into the knuckle without pausing, and my breath catches. He swirls it around, exploring my depths, and I can't stop my hips from moving with him. Another finger joins the first and I feel the first ache of stretch. I wriggle as the fingers pump into me, scissoring and stretching me open, and noises erupt from my throat, moans that can't be mistaken for anything other than needy appreciation.

Fingers tangle into my hair and pull hard, pain shooting through my scalp. At the same time, he buries his fingers deep inside me, pried as wide as they can go, stretching me further. I screw my eyes shut and give a muffled cry of pain and pleasure as my hips make a single aborted thrust.

"Want to stop?" he mutters into my ear.

I shake my head as much as I can and grunt in a way that I hope sounds like “fuck no.” It must work, because he keeps the grip on my hair, twisting it between his fingers, keeping the pressure on my neck as he pulls it back, and eases his fingers back into a pumping rhythm. I melt. It feels so good being trapped in place like this, as he moves me and uses me as he wants. He’s completely in control, I can’t even get hard without his permission. And fucking hell that turns me on even more.

A third finger slips in, and I groan again. At the same time his other hand leaves my hair, snakes around my body, and finds the chain attached to my nipples. He tugs. The clamps pinch and pull, and I writhe.

Then the fingers leave my hole, and I’m suddenly empty. I make a pathetic noise of disappointment. A part of me is embarrassed, but a much bigger part is needy and disappointed and desperate for more. I twist around.

He has his back to me at the table, but his body is blocking whatever he’s picking up. Then he turns around with the long black ridged dildo in his hand. My stomach drops. It’s huge; long and smooth, with knotty lumps along the shaft, starting small and tapering to a much wider base with a suction cup. His eyes meet mine for a moment, drinking in my expression.

As he walks back over to me with slow deliberate steps, he runs lube along its full length until it’s black ridges glisten. He turns me around and my pulse thrums as he positions the dildo between my ass and the wall, setting the wide suction base in place, and lines the tip up between my cheeks. I let out a stifled noise as he pushes the end of the dildo into my asshole, and holds me there, with just the very tip, cold and slick, pressed inside me as I clench around it. He lets go and strokes the lines of my cock cage, teasing me with fleeting contact.

“Push back, take it into your hole and open yourself up for me. I want to watch you squirm and sweat while you impale yourself.”

I grunt, bite down on the gag, and do what he says. I push back, and the slick dildo wedges into my ass.

“That’s right,” he says.

I reach the first ridge and twitch as my asshole stretches. Then my hole closes around it and my body slumps.

“Don’t stop. I want it all the way in. I want you nice and open for me when I decide to fuck you.”

He takes a seat on the wide couch on the other side of the room, and makes himself comfortable as he watches me, enjoying my torment. My legs tremble as I push back, and the shaft of the dildo enters inch by inch, stretching me wider and wider, filling me up more and more. With each ridge my body jerks and pleasure pulses in my core. With my head lowered in effort, I huff a breath through my nose. I feel like I'm doing a strenuous workout. Sweat trickles between my shoulder blades. Between my legs, my cock aches, livid in its cage, while I slowly, agonizingly fuck myself onto the dildo for his entertainment. Jesus Christ. This is filthy and degrading, and just too fucking hot. Is it possible to come in a cock cage? Because I think I might.

I look up through my damp hair. He's watching me with a ravenous look on his face, like he wants to completely devour me. Take me apart. His hands grip the couch cushion, like he's having to use a great effort to stay seated. Like he wants to run over here and tear me apart. I want it too.

By the time I'm most of the way impaled on the dildo, I'm panting and whimpering. It's so big I don't think I can take any more inside. He either senses my struggle or gets bored watching, pushes up off the couch, comes over and inspects my ass, just like he did with my page summaries when I was studying. I guess this is the same kind of thing, he's just making me work in a different way.

"Good boy," he says. "It's almost all the way in."

I flush at his praise.

He reaches behind me and detaches the dildo from the wall, then releases my bound hands from the ring. It's all I can do not to collapse on the spot. Pulling the rope, he leads me to the table, and I move stiffly with him, the dildo moving and shifting inside me with each step, nudging against my inner walls.

He folds me over the table, bent with my ass in the air, and I'm surprised to find it's slightly padded. A goddamn sex table.

The nipple clamps twist and rub against the surface as the rope is retied above me, stretching my arms and torso across the table.

He pulls my legs wide apart. Leather wraps around one ankle, tight enough to dig in but not quite enough to hurt, and then the other. I shift my feet, but I can't move them any closer together because of the metal bar between them. My legs are now spread wide, so that I'm even more

exposed than before, held in place and unable to move, with my asshole on display.

A generous amount of lube trickles down my ass crack. The dildo shifts as he takes hold of the base and eases it out of my asshole, one tremulous ridge at a time. Each one drags against my rim and makes me catch my breath and my knees shake.

It's nearly all the way out when he stops, twists it slightly, and then shoves it back in again. My asshole pops around each ridge. I gasp, and he fucks it in and out of my hole, going deeper each time.

"Ugh!" I writhe and twitch, clenching around it automatically to try to slow its invasion, but it slides in and out smoothly, slick with the lube.

"You take it so well, Nolan," he says. It's stupid how good the praise makes me feel. I press my burning cheek against the cool padded tabletop.

"Do you like this, North? Do you like when I tie you down and fuck you with my toy?"

I clench my teeth. I can't speak with the gag in my mouth. He holds all the power. And I hold none. It makes my head spin and my cock twitch.

"Yes," I try to say, but it comes out as a wordless grunt, so I just nod feebly.

"You fucking love it, don't you. Filthy slut."

He pumps the dildo, hard and fast, and I squirm and flex my hips, more sweat running down my back. Suddenly, with a twist, it hits against my prostate and my whole body arches against the table as stars spark across my vision and I give a strangled groan.

"You hide it so well from everyone else. Your friends, the guys on the team. But you can't hide it from me. I can see how much you need to be dominated. I own you, and I can do whatever I want with you, and you'll love every fucking second of it because you're my cum whore. Isn't that right?"

God, the words are falling out of him now like he can't control them. I nod again, eyes clenched shut.

He keeps the angle, hitting my sweet spot over and over until it's almost too much. I moan and grunt through the gag obscenely, almost glad that it stops the words spilling from my mouth. Because who knows what I'd be saying right now. I sure as fuck don't.

Finally, after one last thrust that has my shoulders hitching, he pulls it all the way out, leaving me empty and aching. I sag against the table

and draw a shaky breath in through my nose. Fuck, that was too much, and not enough, and I want more. I need to come.

He pulls my cheeks apart, exposing my stretched and sensitive hole to the air. I know what I must look like; legs spread wide, my asshole pink and loose, slick and shiny with lube. More lube trails down my open crack and over my asshole, making it flutter against the cold fluid.

“You look so good like this, Nolan.” He runs his fingers over my hole, circling the twitching rim of sensitive muscle that screams out for more. “Just perfect.”

As if to make his point, he presses two fingers into my hole and they slide in easily. He twists and bends them just right, they stroke up against my prostate, and I spasm. I jerk again when his other hand reaches around and fingers the cage trapping my dick, and gives it one lazy stroke, fingers brushing between the bars, and then tugs at my swollen balls.

I groan; I’m already so close to climax, even with it on, I can feel the need coiling and twisting in my belly. I need to come with every fiber of my being. I need to get hard. The sound of a zip catches my attention. I can’t see what he’s doing, but if that’s what I think it is—

The blunt head of his cock nudges against my twitching hole as he lines himself up. He’s going to fuck me now. The thought makes me giddy. He pushes, and after a moment of pressure against my asshole, he slips the head of his dick inside. In one slow pump, he pushes all the way in until he’s buried to the hilt. My body bucks under him as he fills me entirely, stretching me wide around him as I writhe, tugging against the ropes tying my hands over my head. He’s huge. The dildo stretched me out, but somehow, he’s still bigger.

He holds still there, letting me catch my breath.

“Snap if it’s too much,” he reminds me.

No fucking way. But I nod to show I understand.

One arm snakes around to tease at my dick and sack, while the other winds around the nipple clamp chain, and tugs. Keeping the pressure on, he eases back until just the head of his cock is pressed up against the inside of my rim.

His breath brushes the back of my ear. “You did so well with the dildo, now I want you to do the same for me. Show me how much you want my cock,” he says. “Move.”

Trembling, I push back, angling my hips so that I take him in as much as I can. But with my arms tied over me I can't move much. I attempt to slide up and down on his dick, managing only an inch. It's not enough, though, and I clench, trying to draw him in further as my need cries out for more. I whine and grunt through the gag. Please.

"Is that not enough cock for you? You want more?"

I nod.

"Do you want me to fuck you?"

I nod. I want him to fuck me so bad. I want him to fuck me so hard and fast I can't breathe.

He tugs the nipple clamps again, sending a searing jolt of electricity through my core.

"Good boy."

With that, he rams his cock in, deep and hard. I shout. He pounds into me relentlessly, each snap of his hips driving me higher and higher.

He touches my cock, and the slight brush makes me cry behind the gag. Precum leaks from the tip. I'm so close to coming, but I can't, and I think I'm going to lose my mind. His fingers rub on my tip through the bars, smearing the fluid around.

It's too much, my hips buck frantically, out of my control. I'm on the edge and tipping over.

"You'd better not come in your cage."

I whimper. I need him to take it off, I need to come. Like right now.

My whole body jerks and writhes, fighting the oncoming orgasm, as he pounds into me hard. The pressure building at the base of my cock grows, and I can't take it much longer.

Suddenly my cock is free. He must have somehow unlocked it without me noticing, which wouldn't be that hard with the state I'm in. My eyes roll back in my head, mouth hanging slack. The next moment his hips stutter, cock spasming inside me, and heat fills me with his release as he climaxes with a groan.

Muffled by the gag, I cry out, my body goes rigid, and I come. As my orgasm smashes through me, my vision whitens, and waves of pleasure shake my body as I fall apart, hips thrusting with each roll. He keeps fucking in, hitting my sweet spot again and again as I spasm, wringing more out of me with each thrust. My eyes water. My breath hitches. The earth shakes.

Finally, it all stills, and for a blissful moment, all that matters is the connection between his body and mine. Everything else falls away,

meaningless in the euphoria.

He flops down on top of me, dead weight crushing me against the table, with his cock still buried deep inside as sweat sticks our skin together.

“Good boy,” he pants into my back.

I close my eyes and let the afterglow bathe me. It feels like we stay like that for ages, but it’s probably just seconds, blissed out of our minds. His weight pins me, and I don’t want him to get up.

Then he shifts, and I feel his lips drag across the skin at the back of my neck as he moves away.

Mal loosens the gag, eases it out of my mouth, and I stretch my jaw and lick my swollen lips. I feel limp all over, like I’ve just run a marathon. He releases me in silence, his movements firm, practiced, efficient, but not ungentle. I’m in a haze as he rubs lotion onto the places where the cuffs and clamps bit into my skin, smoothing it across the red indentations. It tingles. I watch him as he does it, and he stares steadfastly at what he’s doing, not meeting my gaze.

Does this mean anything, or is this just his part of the deal? I shouldn’t hope for more from him, but I can’t help it. I want him to care for me in a way he doesn’t care for anyone else. It’s stupid but I want him to like me in a romantic way, too.

“Why can’t I stay away from you?” I say. I’m so blissed out right now I feel drunk, and my words slur.

He pauses, looking up at me with heavy eyes. His hair and clothes are ruffled, the messiest I’ve ever seen him, with dark hair stuck to his forehead with sweat, and I’m proud that it’s because of me and no one else. He thinks for a moment, then speaks in a low voice.

“Because everyone loves you. You throw a ball and everyone claps and cheers. You smile, and they swoon. Everyone is in love with you.” His mouth widens slightly into something that could be a smile but isn’t. “Except me. And you can’t stand it, but at the same time, deep down, you crave it. No one else can give you what I can.”

He goes back to rubbing my flesh in firm circles and I stare at his lowered face, kinda freaked out, because I think it might be true. I want to win his affection because he won’t give it to me like everyone else does. That’s why he has so much power over me. I shift on the table. That’s a peek into my subconscious that I didn’t need.

When my skin is smooth and slick with the lotion, he stops and hands me a robe.

“Put this on.”

It’s soft and warm and when I wrap it around myself, suddenly I’m so tired I can barely keep my eyes open.

“Is this the part when you kick me out?” I ask, only half joking.

He gives me a long look and brushes the hair off his face. “You can stay if you want. I have spare rooms.”

A spare room sounds better than the cold night, but not as good as his room. But it’s progress. It’ll do for now. I try to suppress my grin.

“Sure.”

The spare room is huge, modern and sparse, like a posh hotel suite. The kind I could never afford to stay in. He disappears and comes back a little while later with a bottle of water, which he silently throws down on the bed. He turns to leave again, and suddenly I’m afraid that this is it, in the morning I’ll get up and go back to my normal life. I need to know where we stand after this, because the sex we just had blows everything else out of the water.

“I don’t understand what’s happening,” I say quickly. It’s not exactly what I meant to say, but it does the trick.

He stops. “What do you mean?”

The right words come to me.

“What is going on between us?” I ask. “What happens now?”

He pauses and thinks for a moment as if he hadn’t considered it, taking me in with his arms crossed across his chest, his black T-shirt showing off his biceps. His expression is indifferent while he does it, and it makes my chest tight.

“If this arrangement works for you, I’m happy to continue.”

A breath I didn’t know I was holding comes out in a rush. It’s not the kind of romantic declaration you see in movies, but it fucking feels like it in this moment. I have to work not to let my grin overtake my face.

“Ok,” I say, going for equally as nonchalant, although I don’t know if I pull it off. I’m feeling pretty damn good right now, like anything is within my grasp. Buoyed up, I feel brave enough to add, “But I want one amendment to the deal.”

“What?” He frowns. “You’re not happy with our agreement?”

I raise my chin. It’s a risky move, because honestly, I’d take the deal as it is. But there’s more I want from him, and I’m willing to push for it.

“I want to kiss you.”

He blinks, regarding me warily, like I suggested we dance naked at midnight on the football field.

"Right now?"

God I would love to kiss him right now. But I shake my head. "Whenever I want."

His jaw tightens. "Perhaps I could allow it as part of your reward system."

I shake my head again, surprised at my own bravery. His offer isn't good enough. "Once a day. At a time of my choosing."

He thinks about it for some time, then drops his arms and nods slowly. "Fine. But I want an amendment too."

Ah. It hadn't occurred to me he could do the same thing. The idea of that is worrying.

"What?" I ask. I'm sure it's going to be something like I'm not allowed to talk to him in public or stay over at his house again. Something to keep some distance between us.

He steps closer to me, closing the gap. "I'm in charge of all aspects of your life, not just studying and sex. I want full control. You can still tap out at any time, but when you're with me, I'm your master."

Ok, not what I was expecting. Full control of everything? If anything, that would bring us closer together. And I must be insane, because that doesn't sound completely awful. Like, yeah it sounds kinda scary and a bit fucked up but . . . I mean he's done a pretty good job after only a week. And I can still tap out any time I like, so really there's nothing to lose, right? To be honest I'd do almost anything if it means he keeps giving me his cock. It's my drug of choice. Mal is my dealer, and he's got me good and hooked. And I'm not afraid to admit it to myself anymore. He's already shown me what he can do for me.

Before I can talk any sense into myself, I nod, and he allows a small smile that hides a multitude of sins and pleasures. A glimpse of the devil, that has heat creeping up my neck. He holds his hand out and I grip it tight as we shake like businessmen.

"Good. Then get some sleep. We have a lot to do tomorrow."

That sounds . . . ominous. He leaves, his wide shoulders swaying like a snake. And despite my enthusiasm seconds ago, I can't help but think; what have I just gotten myself into?

TRAINED BY MY TEAMMATE

1

-MALCOLM-

NORTH'S SNORING wakes me up. Someone might read something into the fact that I put him in the spare room that's closest to mine, but it doesn't mean anything. It was purely convenience. And now I'm wishing I'd stuck him as far away as possible.

There's no point in trying to go back to sleep, so I shower, dress in loose running clothes, and eat breakfast before I go back to check if he's awake yet.

I had hoped that he would have woken up by the time I finished, but he's still snoring like a belt saw. Which leaves me with a dilemma; how do I go about waking him up?

I hover outside the door, feeling strangely uneasy. I've never had someone stay the night before; most of my sessions take place at a designated space, and the few subs that I've had here in the past always went back home afterward, so this was never an issue.

Should I knock? But what if he doesn't hear it over the sound of his own snoring? Do I go in there? That feels too intimate. I could just leave him to sleep, but at this rate, he'll be out until noon, and I have things I want to do today. Things I want to do with North, and *to* North. And I don't like changing my plans.

I shift on my feet, stuck in indecision.

I could set an alarm clock for thirty seconds, sneak in, put it by his bed, and then leave quickly.

I huff at myself. Why am I agonizing over this so much? I go back to the kitchen and call his phone. After far too many rings his voice comes across the line, croaky and rough with sleep.

"Uh, whassit?"

"Come downstairs," I say.

"Hmm? Wha time is it?" I can imagine the way he squints around, blinking the sleep from his blue eyes. Rubbing the drool from his cheek on the back of his hand.

"Time to get up."

He grunts. “Where are you?”

“In the kitchen. Get dressed and come downstairs before I come up there and get you myself. And I won’t be gentle.”

That wakes him up. There’s a long pause, and then his voice comes through, flustered but clearer.

“Oh-I-Uh, gimme a second.”

About half an hour later heavy footsteps sound on the stairs, and he finally appears in the doorway. His blond hair is messy and his face is marked with the lines of sleep. Part of me bristles at how stupidly cute he looks like this. No one has any business looking this cute first thing in the morning after rolling out of bed.

“You took too long,” I say. “When I tell you to come, I expect you to come straight away.”

He scratches his head and stretches his long lean body. “But it’s like asscrack o’clock, man,” he says, blinking blearily. He looks like a fucking overgrown sleepy puppy.

I don’t trust myself to speak, so I just push a tall glass across the counter to him, and he eyes it suspiciously.

“Drink this.”

“What is it?” he asks.

“It’s a blend of protein and fiber. It’s your breakfast.”

He wrinkles his nose and I die a little inside. “It looks rank.”

“It’s good for you. Drink it. Or I’m going to have to punish you.”

His cheeks stain red like he’s been slapped in the face, and he readjusts the front of his sweatpants. I watch as he takes a sip, lingering on the way his throat bobs as he swallows. He grimaces and tips his head, weighing it up.

“Actually it’s not that bad. Could use a bit of sugar.”

“Starting from now, you are going to eat healthily. You are going to get up at a reasonable time, and go to bed at a reasonable time.”

This is part of the deal we’ve made. I control every aspect of his life, in and out of the bedroom. He doesn’t get to go to the toilet unless I say he can. Theoretically speaking. Obviously, I’m not going to go to that extreme, but you get the idea.

He frowns. “What do you count as reasonable, because Jeff has a kegger on Friday night and—”

I cut him off, “No alcohol.”

He looks startled and I worry for a moment if that’s enough to break our deal. I don’t want to push him too far, that’s not my aim, but I have

certain standards I expect him to maintain. And being fit and healthy is one of them.

To soften the blow I add, “Unless I give you permission. And you have to earn it.”

He sighs and rubs a hand over his face. Even though ending this agreement is the last thing I want, I round the island and catch his attention. It’s important that he knows the terms.

“If any of this is a problem for you, you know how you can end it.”

His eyes flick down to my lips and then up again.

“No, it’s no problem.”

Ah yes, the one part of our deal that I have no control over: the kiss. He gets to kiss me once a day, at any time of his choosing. It makes me more uncomfortable than it should. It’s just a kiss, but it hangs over me like Damocles’ sword.

My eyes are drawn down to his lips. I know what it’s like to kiss them now. The one and only time we kissed, over a week ago, it was me who initiated it. The memory of that kiss feels dirtier than the hot hard fucking I gave him on the bleachers afterward. But it was his fault, he pushed me until I lost control, and it’s not going to happen again.

His mouth twitches. Is he going to kiss me now? I’m breathing faster than I should be. I spin away and hurry for the door, not looking back.

“Hurry up and drink that. We’re going for a run.”

2

-NORTH-

WHEN MAL said he wanted to control all aspects of my life, I didn't think he meant healthy eating and morning exercise. I was thinking more along the lines of, I don't know, hot sex at all hours of the day. Serving him with my body at the drop of a hat. The idea had been scary in a kinky way.

Not *practical* stuff. Not *healthy* stuff. This is torture, but not the fun sexy kind. What the hell have I done to deserve this?

I groan as I run a few paces away from him. Dressed in expensive-looking track clothes, his ass sways as he runs in front of me, his built arms pumping. But even that view can't cheer me up. The sun has just started to peek over the horizon, and it's a glorious fucking morning. One that I shouldn't have to see because I should still be asleep.

It's not like I don't exercise, of course I do, I'm the star of the football team and I'm fit as hell. I just don't do it at stupid o'clock in the morning.

"Why are we doing this again?" I ask. The dew-soaked grass soaks my socks and the bottom of my sweatpants.

"Because it's good for you," he says.

That's the second time this morning he's said that. What exactly is his plan here? How does being my personal trainer feed into his sexual gratification? Does he just get off on tormenting me?

I huff out a breath. Actually yeah, what am I saying? Of course he does. That's definitely it.

"How long are we gonna do this for?" Maybe I can go back to bed once we've wrapped this up.

"For as long as I say so," he snaps. He's starting to sound more irritated than usual.

I grumble.

We run across an open field of grass toward a densely packed forest. When we reach the edge of the trees, I slow, expecting him to say it's time to turn back, but he carries right on, finding a path that

snakes through the trees. He must run here often. He probably does it every morning.

After a while, though, he weaves off the path entirely, heading into the packed trunks and undergrowth. I follow him, grumbling inside my head. What is this, all-terrain running? I haven't got the right shoes for this. It's not until we're completely out of sight from the path that he stops.

"Come here," he says.

Now what? I obey, expecting him to make me drink some other healthy sludge, or drop and give him twenty. Instead, he backs me up against a tree and fits his hand around my throat. I gulp, my blood suddenly rushing in my ears.

"I've had just about enough of your bratty whining. If I say run, you shut up and run." His face is inches from mine, his eyes hot. His breath brushes against my cheek, minty and fresh. "I'm this close to bending you over and spanking your ass raw right here, but I'll give you one more chance to impress me. We're going to play a little game; you run, as fast as you can, and if I catch you . . ." he moves against me, and I can feel the hard length of his erection against my hip suggestively. "Understand?"

Holy Jesus Christ, this is more like it. He pauses, waiting for my response, and I gulp again and nod.

He lets go. "Run."

I take off at the speed of light, kicking up dirt and leaves behind me. As I put some distance between us, my pulse racing, I glance behind. He's just standing there watching me with those dark predator eyes, giving me a head start, and it sends a thrill through me that grounds in my caged cock. That look tells me everything I need to know; no matter how fast I run he's going to catch me, and then he's going to do whatever he wants to me.

Then he comes after me, arms pumping, long powerful legs a blur of motion. His body moving like a well-oiled machine. Fuck, he's hot.

I run as fast as I can. I want him to catch me, but I also want the chase, the thrill of being hunted, of giving it my all and still being beaten.

As we play a game of cat and mouse through the trees, I actually feel the thrill of fear, like I'm a rabbit running from a wolf. But this wolf already owns me, and I know it.

I'm fast, but his legs are longer than mine, and it isn't long before I can hear him only a pace behind me, nipping at my heels. I risk a glance over my shoulder, and he's there, almost on top of me, teeth bared in a silent growl. He's so close he could reach out and grab me now, but he doesn't, drawing the hunt out, toying with me.

I try to dodge to the side and then backstep around him, like I do in football when I'm trying to lose an opponent, but the unfamiliar rough ground trips me and he throws an arm out and catches me around the waist. I lose my feet, and then he barrels me into a tree. Before I know what's happening, I'm against the trunk, my arms are pulled up over my head, and cold metal clicks around my wrists, holding them in place. I gasp and look up. He's got me handcuffed to a thin branch above my head.

He brought the handcuffs? I look at him, my mouth open. He was planning this all along.

"That's right," he hisses in my ear and his fingers tangle in my hair, pulling my head back. "You're mine, any place, any time. And I'm going to remind you of that."

He tugs the neck of my top to one side and closes his mouth on the sensitive spot where my neck meets my shoulder. He sucks the flesh between his lips and bites down, working and rolling my skin as he fumbles my sweatpants down with his other hand. Then I'm bare, the cool breeze brushing my cock and balls as I moan at the feel of his possessive mouth marking me.

He sticks two fingers into my mouth, getting me to suck on them briefly, and then rubs the spit between my cheeks on the tight circle of my asshole. I move my hips, trying to get the digits inside, and he spanks my ass hard.

"Keep still."

I bite down on my lip and try to hold my groan in. Fuck, I love it a bit too much when he disciplines me, but I don't want him to know. Knowing him, he'd probably stop doing it.

He returns his fingers to my ass and then works them inside me, stretching me out one digit at a time, until I'm breathing heavily with my eyes squeezed shut.

He spits into his hands and then holds it under my mouth. I look at him, confused.

"Spit," he says.

Thank fuck for that, for a moment there I thought he was going to make me lick it up. Which actually, oh no, is kinda hot.

I spit a wad of saliva into his hand, where it mixes with his.

“Good boy.”

A tingle ripples through me, from the top of my head to my sack. Why do I get such a visceral reaction to any kind of praise from him? Probably because it’s so rare.

He sticks his hand down the front of his joggers, and takes his cock out, slicking it with our spit. He pumps his stiff length a few times, then rubs the head of his cock at the crease of my leg between my crotch and thigh. I grit my teeth as my cock tries to harden in its cage, only to strain against the metal and soften again.

He slides his dick up and down and I groan in my throat. Then he crouches and hooks his hands around my knees, hoists my legs up onto his shoulders, so my sweatpants and boxers are hooked over the back of his neck, and I’m hanging, back pressed against the tree, half my weight supported by the rough bark, my other half braced against his front.

Gripping my hips hard, he pumps his dick up and down a few times slowly, then spits again into his other hand and starts to finger my asshole.

He picks up the pace, rubbing his cock against my own caged dick, and sliding his fingers in and out of my hole until I jerk against the tree with every thrust, the bark rough against my back and my hair sticking to my face.

The fact that I can’t come, or even get hard, is so fucking hot. He’s using me for his pleasure, taunting me with my inability to release, and I get nothing in return. I’m just a hole for him to use and tease. A walking fucktoy. His finger slides against my sweet spot and I whine and rut against him.

The bumping of his cock on the bars of my cage is a pathetic amount of stimulation, but it feels so fucking good.

He fucks into me, his long finger repeatedly sliding on my prostate until I’m gasping.

“This is what you get when you’re a brat,” he says through clenched teeth. “Do you want to come?”

I nod. God, I want to come so bad.

“Well, I’m not going to let you. You haven’t earned it yet. You only get to come when I say so.”

The pure humiliation of being denied, while being finger fucked up against a tree where anyone passing by can see me, is enough to almost make me come anyway. The pressure in my balls is immense as my cock strains.

He speeds up, sliding his cock against my cage in a frenzy, fucking his fingers in deep and hard. His hips stammer, then he stiffens, hunches, and releases up my stomach, moaning, and mouths at the hickey mark on my neck. The noises he makes when he loses control, on the wave of orgasm, sound so good. I want more of them, I want to see that control slip for good.

It doesn't last long though. His body melts, then he visibly collects himself again and tucks himself away. He lowers my legs and pulls my sweatpants up, leaving his cum marking me under my clothes, and releases me from the handcuffs. I fall back against the tree, achingly aroused, as he checks my wrists. My skin tingles where he touches my half-numb hands. His pale skin is flushed, his eyelashes lowered against his cheeks. My heart is hammering far too fast and it's making me feel reckless.

He's had his fun, now it's my turn. I was going to save it up for the best moment, but fuck it, I want it now.

Mal drops my hands, slipping the cuffs back into his pocket.

"Now, the next time I tell you to—"

I grab him by the front of his top, cutting him off, and push him against the tree, switching our positions.

His eyes, still heavy with his orgasm, widen as I kiss him hard.

3

-MALCOLM-

IT COMES out of the blue. One second, I'm coming down from the high of my climax, and the next my back's to the tree I just had North up against, and he's kissing me like he's got a personal vendetta against my mouth. I'm so surprised that for a moment I forget how to breathe and just stare at his face.

He lets out a sigh and works my lips open with his, pushing his tongue inside my mouth. I'm frozen on the spot.

I've stripped him naked, fucked him with a dildo, edged him with a vibrating butt plug. I've put my dick in his mouth, in his asshole . . . but that was just sex. *This*, this is something else. And it's something I don't want. Something I can't have. This feels too intimate. An alarm sounds in my head to push him off, back away.

But this is part of our deal, this is what I agreed to—one kiss a day. So I can't.

I fist my hands at my sides to stop myself from grabbing onto him like a drowning man and try to keep my breathing even. Can he feel how hard my pulse is racing? I don't want him to know he has the power to make me react like this with something as stupidly pathetic as a fucking kiss. When he pulls away he's smiling that big dumb puppy dog smile, and his lips are wet and pink.

What do I do now? I feel completely off-kilter, like he's tipped my world up on its axis. I had a whole day planned out, but now my head feels empty, and I feel loose and weirdly bubbly.

His smile dims, sensing something's not right. He looks like he's about to ask me if I'm ok, so I speak quickly before he can.

"Go back to the house," I say, fishing the keys out of my pocket and holding them out to him.

He frowns, and that puppy dog smile drops completely. "Huh?"

"I said go back."

"Why?" he says.

I grit my teeth. “Why is it so hard for you to understand the concept of doing what I say without questioning me?” I snap, completely on edge. “I don’t have to explain myself to you.”

He watches me, unsure. He’s looking for some kind of clue for my sudden mood change, but I’ve got my mask up again and he won’t see anything that I don’t want him to. I won’t let him.

“Ok, well, should I just wait there for you?”

I relax a little. “Yeah. Shower off. I want you clean and naked when I get back, wearing your collar.”

That makes him flush red. “Ok.”

I let out a breath. That was close. I don’t want to scare him off again. If I’m going to own him completely I need to take a slightly softer approach than before, otherwise he might get mad again and call it off. The thought of that makes my stomach twist, and I push the feeling away.

He shoots me a small, uncertain smile and heads back the way we came. I watch him until he disappears through the trees, then un-tense. I lean back against the tree and push a hand through my hair. Shit. I’m not sure what just happened, but I can’t let it happen again.

I push off the tree and keep on running, my mind racing along with me.

No, I’m fine. North isn’t the only one who’s been working hard all week. I’m just tired. That’s all it is.

I just need a little bit of a break from him, to make sure my head’s on straight and I don’t make any stupid mistakes. Like actually fall for him.

4

-North-

IS IT weird that I'm in his house without him? Yeah. I feel so out of place here.

So what the hell was that about? I'm almost past trying to figure him out, but every time he does something that confuses me, I'm drawn right back in again. He's like the world's most confusing, infuriatingly sexy puzzle.

This place is stupidly big, and it takes me a while of wandering around and opening random doors that lead to more stylishly sterile rooms until I find a bathroom. He's got one of those fancy rainfall showers because of course he does. I strip out of my clothes, leaving them in a pile on the floor, and let out a groan as I step in. The hot water runs over my body and melts my stiff muscles. It feels great on my oversensitive dick, too, easing its ache a little. With the temp turned up to scalding, steam billows out and fills the room like a sauna.

On the side is a whole pharmacy of bottles. How many different shampoos does one guy need? The image of Malcolm, this big, hulking, grumpy looking dude, coming in here and pampering himself is kinda funny, and I grin. I pick through them and try a shower gel that's scented with lemongrass and mint. Popping the lid, I take a sniff. Mmm, fresh. Much nicer than the dollar store one-bottle-does-all stuff I have.

I use a healthy dollop and then pick through the bottles again, selecting some things at random and trying them out. I have to admit I'm enjoying the luxury. If this is part of the package, I could get used to it.

As I indulge, I ache to slip my hand around the cock cage and touch myself through the bars, but Mal wouldn't want that, so I keep my hands away, only washing over the area with quick movements. Even that is enough to make me shudder and bite my lip.

After a good long soak, I towel off. He told me to be naked, so I don't bother getting dressed, although it feels weird as hell being naked in someone else's house when they're not there. Like some kind of weird voyeur or something. But, embarrassingly, it's naughty enough to be arousing as hell. It feels like that perfect balance of dangerous and naughty, that's sexy as hell.

I put on the collar, my heart skipping as I fasten it, and go wait in the living room for him to return. But I'm twitchy and restless, and two minutes later I decide to use the opportunity while Mal's away to wander around the house. My time here so far has only been spent in a few rooms. So I wander around, opening doors and snooping. It's all pretty sparse, like a fancy hotel. No personal touches, like photos. It could be fresh out of a catalog.

Upstairs I poke into all of the bedrooms, even though I know they'll be just like the one I slept in. I try to convince myself that it's because I'm interested in all of them, but really, I know what I'm doing. I'm looking for Mal's bedroom. Because I'm a nosy fucker and I want to see what it's like, dammit.

I'm starting to think that his room might actually be one of the empty ones I assumed was spare, and he really is a soulless vampire, but then I open the door directly opposite the one I stayed in last night. Unlike all of the other rooms in the house, this one feels like it's been lived in. Jackpot.

I feel like I've discovered the forgotten tomb of Tutankhamen. There must be answers in here to the puzzle of Malcolm Blackwood, and my fingers itch to rummage through his things. But, even though I want to go charging in, I hesitate on the threshold. This is Mal's bedroom. There's a line that I'm about to cross. He's never actually told me not to go in his room, but, come on, this is Mal. His favorite color is probably top-secret information. This is his private space. But I want, no I *need*, to know more. It's an uncontrollable urge that I can't ignore any more than I could a hungry tummy.

Holding my breath, I step in. No alarms go off, a hidden trap doesn't fall from the ceiling, the walls don't sprout spikes and start to close in. I look around. It's the only room in the house with any personality other than "rich luxury." The first thing to catch my eye is an orchid on the table in front of the window, the leaves shiny and green, with pale purple flowers sprouting along its stem. I don't know much about orchids, but it looks healthy. Ok, didn't have him down as a plant guy.

There's a pile of books stacked on the floor by the bed, judging by the spines, mostly sci-fi titles. I recognize a few bestsellers in there. I don't know why but I always imagined he'd read physics textbooks for entertainment, or, I don't know, ancient memoirs. Not space operas. Interesting. I check the side table and almost lose my mind at what I find there; a pair of glasses. I stare at them. They're thick-rimmed in that stylish but nerdy kinda of way. Mal wears glasses? I pick them up like they might explode and hold them to my eyes, squinting through them. Holy shit, he's blind as hell. So does he wear contacts most of the time? Or is he just really good at guessing where everything is? They clink gently as I put them back, head spinning. This is revolutionary. I'm starting to think that Mal might be a bit of . . . a *nerd*. Mind blown.

Behind the glasses is a photo in a frame. The expression on the kid's face is so different I don't recognize it's him at first. But the more I look the more I realize they're the same. The same dark hair, pale skin, and dark brown eyes, and that nose that I didn't notice until right this second was cute. He's smiling shyly, head ducked, in a way I would never imagine Malcolm doing. He looks like he's about twelve maybe? And he's holding something in his hand that looks like a tiny trophy cup, like the ones they give away at kids' races.

Next to him, wearing big round glasses and classic mom jeans, is a woman with the same dark hair, but hers is curly, not poker straight like Mal's. And her eyes are a bright, almost startling blue, instead of brown. She looks tired, but happy, smiling away, and the way she's standing slightly behind him with her arms spread makes it look like she's presenting young Mal to the camera in a proud "look at this kid" kind of way.

I frown. Mal's never said anything about his family, all I know is that his dad is rich as hell. It's hard to tell her age, but is this his mom? Or an older sister maybe?

Something catches the light behind the photo, drawing my attention. A small cheap looking golden cup. It must be the one in the photo. I pick it up and read the inscription on the base:

1ST PLACE
GALA DAY FUN RUN
UNDER 15'S

Ok, none of this is answering any questions, it's just giving me more! What happened to make him so different from the kid in this picture? Who is this lady? And why has he kept a crappy award from a kids' race?

From downstairs the front door bangs and I jump, nearly knocking everything on the side table over. Shit, he's back. Heart racing, I make sure everything's where I found it, and hurry out of the room, easing the door closed behind me.

Mal's in the hallway downstairs, pink-cheeked and out of breath, his hair and clothes sticking to him with sweat. He looks like he's just run a marathon. I hover on the stairs, feeling a bit vulnerable and utterly ridiculous standing here completely naked wearing nothing but a collar and a cock cage. And when I'm feeling weird, I joke.

"Honey, you're home!" I say cheerfully.

He stares up at me, completely deadpan. Not even the hint of a smile. Yeesh.

He clears his throat and pulls his running shoes off. "From now on, when you're in my house I expect you to be wearing the collar at all times, and I expect you to be naked unless I tell you otherwise."

It's impossible to hide the full-body flush that sweeps across me at his commanding tone.

"Ok."

He straightens. "Now come here and get down on your knees."

My knees almost give way. I do as he says, lowering myself at his feet, and he clips the leash onto my collar and makes me crawl behind him into the front room. He takes a seat on a deep comfy chair, positioning me on my knees between his legs, so my face is inches away from his crotch, still wearing his sweaty running gear. I hold myself as still as I can, eager with the anticipation of what he's going to make me do.

He watches me for a moment, then picks up a book from the side table, turns it to the bookmark, and starts to read, completely ignoring me. The spine says *Culture and Anarchy*, not the sci-fi I now know he reads. That's interesting.

I kneel here. Am I supposed to be doing something? He would have told me if he wanted me to do something. I fidget, uneasy. What if he expects me to know what to do? Am I supposed to be sucking him off? I reach for his fly, but he pushes my hand away.

"Stay still."

Okay? My knees start to ache. I'm just kneeling here staring at the bulge in his pants, completely naked while he reads. Is he even going to do anything to me? By the time he shifts in his seat and puts the book down, I'm struggling to stay on my aching knees, flushed with embarrassment, and almost desperate for his attention. My head snaps up like a dog as he unzips his fly and gets his half-hard dick out, an inch from my nose. The musky smell of his sweat hits my nose and my mouth waters instinctively. He's going to get me to suck off his sweaty dick and it's utterly humiliating.

He taps his dick against my jaw.

"Open up," he says, and when I obediently open my mouth, he slides it between my lips. The tang of sweat fills my mouth and nose, all-enveloping. I grunt and start to suck, but he grabs the back of my neck.

"I didn't tell you to suck me off. Keep still. I just want to keep my cock warm with your mouth."

I stop, shooting him a confused look with my lips stretched around him. So what, he just wants me to kneel here with his dick sitting in my mouth? That's even more humiliating than having to suck him off like this—he isn't even using me for pleasure. My mouth is just some sort of glorified cock snug. I breathe steadily through my nose, each forced breath a lungful of him, and concentrate on keeping still and not running my tongue along the warm length of his shaft. It's surprisingly hard, I ache to be allowed to swallow around him and pleasure him until he blows his load in my mouth. I look up at him pleadingly, but he just picks up his book again and starts reading. Another red-hot flush of humiliation and I squirm as my cock tries to fill. This is going to be torture if I don't clear my mind. I think about all the things I want him to let me do. Top of my list is come. But I can't until he allows it. It's almost comforting to have the choice taken out of my hands.

"Finger yourself."

The command catches me off guard and I look up at him again. He's lowered the book and is watching me with those dark, wolf eyes. My stomach drops, and I reach around and press my fingers to my asshole. I grunt quietly around his half-hard cock as I push one finger inside, closing my eyes for a moment as the sensitive muscle gives. I stare up at him while I ease my fingers in and out of my hole, breathing faster as I keep my lips stretched around his dick. It hardens in my mouth, pushing back until it brushes on the back of my tongue.

He puts the book down completely and watches me, his face completely blank. I can tell he's enjoying it, but his cold hard exterior, the look of indifference for me as I finger myself for him, makes me squirm and press my fingers in harder.

"Turn around," he says. "I want to see you working that tight hole."

I pull off his cock, now solid and glistening with my spit. Supporting my weight on one arm, I turn. With my ass displayed for him, I fuck my fingers into my hole with shameful vigor, whimpering as they drag against my rim. I need more, I'm so fucking turned on. My balls hang low between my legs, aching with the pent-up need to release. It's the second time I've had fingers up my ass today, and it's not even lunchtime.

"That's right. Put another finger in."

I want to look back at him, to see what his face looks like. I add another, stretching myself out and rocking my hips.

"Good boy. Do you want your hole filled?"

The offer has my heart racing as I continue to pump my fingers into myself.

"Yes," I gasp.

"Earn it," he says. "Fuck yourself with your fingers. I want to see you dripping in your cage."

I groan and push in as hard and fast as I can. It's an awkward angle like this on my hands and knees, I can't get them in as far as I need to. I push back with my hips, taking my fingers into my starving hole as much as I can, whimpering, until finally I hit the spot and shudder. My cock is throbbing between my thighs, growing damp, as I work the same spot deep inside me, until finally a bead of fluid drips from the tip of the cage.

"Stop," Mal commands.

I moan and pull my fingers out, feeling painfully empty, and my asshole clenches around nothing, desperate to be filled. I grit my teeth at the helpless arousal rushing through me.

CRACK

His hand comes down on my ass hard, making my whole body jump, and I whimper at the hot burning pain stinging my cheeks.

"Good boy."

Fuck. Is it possible to die from being ridiculously and shamefully turned on? Because if it is, I'm a goner.

5

-MALCOLM-

CRACK

I spank his red ass again, enjoying the way it makes his body ripple and clench. Fuck he looks so good like this, his lean powerful body bare, on his knees for me, collared and obedient and all mine. How did I get this lucky?

I cut the thought off and push it aside. That's dangerously close to sentimental. But still . . . he does look good, I can admit that at least.

I run my hand along his back and over his ass, his skin smooth and hot as a fever. Then I stand.

"Stay there," I say.

He waits obediently on his hands and knees as I fetch the things I need from another room. When I come back he's still there, twitching and panting. He's so desperate for me to fill him up, and I have to swallow at the sight of him, his defined muscles tensed, the bulk of his body bent and trembling.

He flinches when I squirt lube down his crack and rub it around with the head of the ribbed black dildo. He moves his hips against it, eager to take it inside, but I pull it back again, teasing him until he's panting and needy.

"You want to be filled up?"

"Yes," he says, breathless and wrecked. It makes my cock twitch. I swipe my tongue over my lips.

"Beg for it."

He groans under his breath. "Please."

I rub the dildo against his hole, pressing and drawing back, teasing him more. "Tell me what you want."

"I want to be filled," he gasps. "I want you to fill me up."

The dildo slides up and down. "How do you want me to fill you?"

He pauses. What, suddenly he has a problem with wanting a huge dildo up his ass? Not having second thoughts, is he? I spank his ass again and he flinches and hisses at the pain.

“Tell me, Nolan. Or I’ll go put my toy away again.”

He shudders a breath out and says, “I want you to fill me up with the dildo.”

I un-tense and smile while he can’t see me. “That’s better.”

A push, and the head of the dildo pushes inside his rim, stretching his hole out tight around it. He gasps and his hips buck. He looks so fucking good it’s taking all of my self-control not to ram it in in one hard shove and watch him squirm. Or even better, throw the dildo away and get my own cock in there. But this is a test for me just as much as it is for him, and I hold it still, just inside his rim of muscle.

“Is this what you want?” I hiss through clenched teeth.

“Y-yes.”

“Tell me why you want it.”

He crumbles, the talking seems to be having just as much effect on him as the dildo. “Because I need it. I need your toy inside me, stretching me and filling me up, and making me feel so good. Please, I need you to fuck me with it. I need it, Mal.” He’s practically wailing at this point, totally lost in his need.

Ugh, hearing him beg like this is like goddamn crack in my veins. A wave of sizzling pleasure rolls through me, setting my own cock throbbing, and I savor the moment, drinking in his trembling body, flushed and already sweaty, and the way his head hangs down between his shoulders, utterly defeated.

“Good boy.”

Then I push the dildo in all the way. His arms buckle beneath him and he almost falls forward but manages to catch himself on his elbows and bears down on the dildo, pushing back as his back arches and his asshole stretches out around it.

“You look so good like this Nolan, stretched out around my toy and begging for more.”

I fuck the dildo in and out, and more fluid leaks from the tip of his cage. I want to milk it all out of him. His body rocks and shakes with every thrust, and I love having this power over him. This strong young man in his prime, the golden boy, loved by all, completely at my mercy and loving every fucking second of it.

Just when it seems like he’s going to completely lose it and come inside his cage, I shove the dildo in deep and let go. He stays there, body shaking, as I go and put my book down on the other side of the room and sit down again, palming my cock through my pants.

“Is that better? Full enough?” I say, and he nods jerkily, his head limp, his blond hair hanging down. “Go get me my book.”

His back stiffens, but he doesn’t say anything. He crawls slowly to the other side of the room where my book is sitting on the side. I don’t want to read it, but I want to make him crawl with that huge dildo up his ass while I sit back and watch. My hand runs lazy circles on the shaft of my cock.

He picks it up in his mouth without me even having to tell him and crawls back to me. His eyes are screwed shut and his body hitches with every movement as the huge dildo moves around inside him. It’s probably pressed up against his prostate. The pressure must be agonizing. I lick my lips and hold my hand out for the book, which he drops into it. Fuck he’s being so good for me. How has he fallen into my training so easily? Who’d have thought North Nolan was a natural sub? I never imagined I would own him so completely. It’s almost enough to make me come on the spot.

I sit back, open the book, and put my feet on his back, like the world’s sexiest footstool. He makes a hot indignant sound. I’m achingly hard, but I pretend to ignore him, just like I did earlier as he trembles under my feet.

“You’ve distracted me enough, Nolan. Fuck yourself with the dildo while I finish my reading. I want to see the cum dripping out of your cage as you struggle through a ruined climax.”

His body reacts to my words, his shoulders clench and hitch. He reaches around and grasps the base of the dildo then starts sliding it in and out of his asshole while I pretend not to watch.

“Faster,” I say.

He picks up the pace. His mouth is hanging open, his eyes are squeezed shut, and his body ripples with each thrust. I watch him wind himself up, torturing himself, until finally, he moans obscenely, helpless and completely wrecked, and his body judders. I watch as he comes inside his cage, and it drips between his legs in a pathetic stream.

Thank fuck his eyes are closed because I can’t take my wide eyes off his face as he milks himself dry with the dildo. The puddle of cum between his legs grows until he finally slumps and breathes raggedly into the carpet.

I put the book down.

“I’ve finished my reading.”

***

Afterward, I take North to the bathroom to clean him off. He steps into the shower and I roll my sleeves up. I rinse him off and take my time washing him until he's pink and clean.

I take special care to lather his caged cock, enjoying the noises he makes and the way he flexes his hips in small, aborted movements against my hand.

He looks like a deity with the water trailing down over his chest, between his defined shoulder blades, over his tight ass and long legs. His blond hair sticks to his head, dark with water.

The washing carries on longer than strictly necessary before I turn the shower off. He steps out, water dripping down the length of his naked body. I want to bend him over the towel rack and fuck him right here and now. I want to cover that smooth toned body with my marks, claim him as all mine.

I grab a towel, big, white, and soft, and rub him down. He holds still and closes his eyes. I start on his chest, rub over his biceps, work down, and give his dick, sack, and ass some attention. He hisses in a breath at the contact and the muscles on his jaw twitch. Then I work down the length of each muscled leg. I step back and take a good long look at him. He's fucking perfect. And he's mine. He stares back at me with his bright blue eyes. His face is expressionless, but his eyes seem . . . open. If that makes sense. Calm. Attentive.

"Follow me."

In the spare room where he spent the night, I point to the floor by the bed. "Sit."

He does, folding his legs under him.

"Stay."

This is perfect. This is exactly how I wanted him. Quiet and obedient. No cheesy grins and no wisecracks.

I go into my room and search in the closet for something for him to wear. He still has the clothes he came in yesterday, but they won't do; a ratty old pair of jeans, T-shirt, and hoodie. I'm going to work on that, but in the meantime, he can have some of mine. I select a pair of pants, a shirt that still has the tags on, and some plain underwear. Then I put the boxers back. I like the thought of him going commando under his clothes, ready for me if I want access at any time.

Back in the spare room, he's still sitting on the floor by the bed, although he's slumped somewhat into a lazy position, with his legs sprawled out and his hand supporting his weight. I'll have to work on that, too. But it can wait.

"Stand."

He gets to his feet lazily and pushes a hand through his still damp hair, so that it sticks up rakishly at odd angles. I get him to spread his legs, hands on the bed, then I take off the cage and put his usual butt plug in. Once I'm done, I unfold the trousers, and he goes to take them.

"No," I say, pulling them away, and then holding them out again, open, for him to slip inside.

He looks confused for a moment, and then a bit embarrassed when he catches on, but he steps into them. I dress him slowly and carefully.

"Are you gonna do this every day? Wash me and dress me?" he asks, sounding half amused, half self-conscious.

"If I want to," I say.

He huffs a quiet breath through his nose as I finish buttoning up the shirt.

"Not sure if I feel like a dog, or a prince."

I should punish him for asking questions and speaking without permission. I've told him enough times not to, but he looks good and the process of dressing him has put me into a calm state of mind. My clothes suit him. A little loose on the shoulders and legs, but he still looks fucking hot. He could make a potato sack look sexy.

"Right. Let's go," I say, leading the way out and down to the hallway, where I grab the keys to the Porsche. I would like to say the Porsche was a gift from my father on my seventeenth birthday, but I bought it on his card for myself. I doubt he even noticed.

North follows at my heels. "Where are we going?"

I quirk an eyebrow.

"Retail therapy," I say. "We're going to fix your wardrobe problem."

He blinks his big blue eyes. "What wardrobe problem?"

6

-Malcolm-

NORTH'S HEAD swivels as the shop assistant leads us into a plush changing room, with comfortable padded chairs, a side table of refreshments, and mirror-lined walls. I take a seat, legs crossed, and he stands in the middle, looking unsure of himself. I'm not surprised. He's probably never set foot anywhere this expensive before, and the decor is hardly subtle.

The shop assistant hooks up the clothes I've picked out and leaves us to it, not even throwing us a questioning look. Well-paid staff know not to ask questions.

North inspects the gold lining around the mirror closest to him. "Well, this is a nice place. Is this where you buy all your socks and jocks?"

I huff a breath of amusement out of my nose. "Take your clothes off," I say.

He looks over at me and I can't tell if he's hesitant or amused. I don't like it when he isn't easy to read. I want to know what he's thinking at all times.

"Are you going to join in?" he asks.

"You're the one with no decent clothes."

He snorts and strips off, until he's fully naked under the bright lights, his image reflected on all sides and all angles. His cock hangs between his legs, already half-hard. I'm allowing him some time free of the cage because he did so well in his training.

He stands with his shoulders back and head tilted slightly, going for cocky, but I can see the awkward tension he's holding in the line of his lips. He has no reason to be self-conscious; his body is perfect. The bright lights pick out a smattering of freckles across his shoulders that I've never noticed before, and I want to press my finger to each one.

He tries on the clothes I've picked out for him one at a time; a selection of long-sleeved tops, button-up shirts, plain black and white T-shirts. Everything is basic, nothing so out of his comfort zone that he'd feel off wearing them, but they're all well-made—the cuts are astoundingly good on him. Seeing him in them fills me with a strange warm feeling that makes my cheeks prickle.

"I like that one," I say, as he slips on a pair of dark slim-fitting pants. "Turn around."

"They feel weird," he says as he fastens the fly.

"That's because you don't own anything that actually fits you properly. It looks good. Now show me the back."

He purses his lips but does a slow rotation. The fabric of the pants hugs his hips and cuts in around his butt, showing it off. These clothes suit him so much more than the baggy tops and mismatched pants he usually wears. They make him look older, more like the man he is, and accentuate his shoulders and slim waist. And, even better, he looks like he's *mine*.

He turns back to face me, looking for my approval.

"Try the sweater."

He wrinkles his face. "Really?"

I raise an eyebrow at his question and he rolls his eyes, slips it on over his head, and looks in the mirror. It suits him, but it's too different from his usual style. His face crinkles.

"I feel stupid," he says, then shrugs it off. "It'd look good on you though."

He tosses it to me, and I catch it instinctively, caught off guard.

"Give it a go."

For a moment I'm flustered. Did something just happen? I feel complimented and it makes me feel weird. I've had compliments before, obviously, but this is so . . . casual. Familiar. I stand up, sweater gripped in my hand.

"I'll try it on, if you put it on me."

He snorts, wrinkling his perfect nose. "You can't get yourself dressed?"

"I want you to do it."

"Fine."

He takes the sweater back, shakes it out, and holds it up. I thread my arms in and he pulls it over my head. I don't know why I asked him

to do this, it makes me feel like a child being dressed clumsily by their parent. Not sexy.

I check out my reflection. My hair is a mess from the sweater, and I look ridiculous. The item isn't something I'd usually go for, too grandaddy for my tastes, and I only added it to the pile of clothes for North to try for the sake of variety. But he's right, it does look surprisingly good on me. Shame about the rest of me.

In the reflection, North stands next to me with his thumbs up, bright and vibrant as the sun in comparison.

"I told you, you look like a hot hipster. Now you just need a pair of round sunglasses."

"Ha, yeah."

I tug it off without thinking, and my top underneath rides up with it around my shoulders, exposing my back.

"How did you get that?"

I freeze. His words are like ice up my spine. "What?"

In the reflection he's staring at my back, his eyes fixed on the scar that runs across my shoulders. In a hurry I tear the sweater off, spin, and yank my top down, covering myself again, and his eyes come up to my face.

"That scar on your back."

My mind's racing and frozen all at once, and I can't think of a response that'll stop him from asking more questions. The seconds drag by.

"It doesn't matter," I manage to say eventually. My hands bundle the sweater up and throw it to one side.

North frowns, but he keeps on pressing. "It must have been something bad."

"I said it doesn't matter."

"Look, if it's something—"

I slap my hand over his mouth. "Stop. Talking," I hiss.

I need a moment to think, my head is buzzing and I need it to stop. I need to distract him because his eyes are confused and curious and concerned in a way that I cannot deal with. He doesn't try to pull away from my hand.

"Get on your knees," I say, almost by instinct.

His eyes widen above my hand and his skin heats.

"On your knees, Nolan!"

He does as I say, slowly lowering himself down. It's like he can't help but obey me. I follow him, keeping my hand in place. The sight of him calms me down a little, and the buzzing reduces. One slow breath. Two. Then I take my hand off his mouth.

"Don't say a word."

I take my belt off and wrap it around his neck, fastening it loosely into a makeshift collar with plenty of give. Choking him isn't my aim right now, but I can think of another way to keep his mouth busy.

I sit back down, holding the end of the makeshift lead.

"Crawl to me," I say.

He's fallen back into the subspace almost instantly, and he crawls over on his hands and knees, staring up at me. Once he's in place between my legs, a pull on the belt directs him toward my crotch. No other prompting is needed; he nuzzles in, nosing at my cock through the fabric of my pants.

Wasting no time, I unbuckle them and push them down my hips, revealing the bulge in my underwear.

"Take my cock out."

He shifts to bring his hands up.

"With your mouth."

His throat bobs as he swallows. He takes the waistband of my underwear in his teeth and tugs down. It's awkward, and he struggles with it for some time. As he's working it down I reach over and lift one of the silk ties from the rack next to me. He's too preoccupied to notice. With a grunt, he finally frees my full cock, and I let him get an eyeful for a few seconds before I snap the tie over his eyes. He jumps, caught off guard, and I tighten the tie around the back of his head into a makeshift blindfold. He makes a small noise that sounds both surprised and very turned on, and I wonder if anyone's ever blindfolded him during sex before.

I take another tie, pull his unresisting arms up over his head, and tie his wrists together to the back of the belt around his neck.

Now blind and unable to use his hands, I guide his head down to my dick with the belt, and his lips close around the tip, warm and wet.

As his head bobs, taking me inside, I slide my hand into the collar of his top, popping the buttons loose one at a time until his shirt hangs open. I find his nipple and start to rub it, and as he picks up speed, I pinch and flick, enjoying the way his moans vibrate around my cock.

For a guy who's apparently inexperienced with giving blow jobs, he's a fucking natural. Don't get me wrong, his technique is average, but he makes up for it with sheer blushing enthusiasm. He sucks my cock like it's the last meal he'll ever have, his brow creased with the desire he can't deny. His cheeks and ears are tipped with a delicious pink glow, embarrassed by his own need.

With his hands behind his back, he can't touch himself, and his hips start to thrust weakly in small, aborted movements. He isn't going to get any satisfaction like that. I lift my foot and grind it between his legs, feeling the solid length of his cock. He grunts and ruts against it.

"Good boy," I say, and he moans again.

The way he looks and the noises he makes are enough to push me to the edge in no time, and before long I twist my fingers into his hair, hips jerking into him. As I come, I twist his nipple hard, he moans around my dick, sending vibrating pleasure through me, and I spill into his mouth. He swallows around me, taking it all in, but despite his best efforts, some dribbles out of his lips and drips onto the leg of my trousers. I release his head and let him pull off, licking his swollen lips, then slide the makeshift blindfold off and point to the cum.

"Clean it up," I say.

His throat bobs, and then he licks it up, lapping it in one flat lick like a cat, looking up at me through his lashes. Fuck.

When I move my foot, the front of his pants are damp with precum. Shame, they looked so good on him. But I can always pick up another pair on the way out. I'll have to tip the assistant extra for ruining these ones.

As I tuck myself away, he watches from his place between my knees; flushed, hair messed, eyes heavy, full lips parted, shirt open, chest heaving, and nipples pink and erect. He looks completely fucked out of his mind.

And he's forgotten all about anything he wanted to ask me.

***

"Oh man, I'm hungry," North says.

We're halfway back to the car, and North has stopped to wave at people at least a dozen times, throwing out *"hey bro*"-s and *"how's it*

hanging"-s like it's Mardi Gras. Who the hell has enough energy for that many friends?

"You only had breakfast a few hours ago," I say.

"Really? Geez, it feels like longer. And all I had for breakfast was that sloppy gunk you gave me."

I look at him, and he pulls a contrite face.

"Which was absolutely delicious and nutritious," he adds.

I *hmm*. I have a schedule for the day all planned out, but I can probably squeeze lunch in now if we don't take too long. And with all that bouncy golden retriever energy he has, he probably burns through calories like kerosene.

"OK, fine. Let's get some lunch."

He beams.

At the food court, I hand North a golden credit card. "Here."

He takes it, frowning.

"What's this for?"

"It's a card. You use it to buy things."

"Ha. But I can buy my own food," he says.

"I'm sure you can."

He rolls his eyes and walks off to inspect the food kiosks. Of course, he has to look at each one before he can make a choice. I grab a super-food salad, with balanced protein, fiber, and carbs, and take a seat at one of the round tables clustered in the middle, and he shows up a moment later with a loaded tray. He sets it down and I eye the contents.

"What's that?" I say.

"It's called food. You put it in your mouth and eat it," he says, echoing my words back at me.

Ha. I narrow my eyes at the loaded chili cheese fries, large shake, and onion rings. The food is so greasy the cardboard cartons they're in are practically see through.

"I told you I expect you to improve your diet while you're mine." He flushes at being called mine. I like that. "I'm going to have to punish you if you eat that."

"Oh really?"

"Yes."

"Hmm." For a moment he looks like he's considering his options, then slowly and deliberately, looking into my eyes, he takes a spoon and scoops a heaped load of chili, dripping with cheese sauce, into his

mouth, drawing it out between his lips slowly like an overly sexual yogurt commercial.

"Oops."

I pull my lips down. "You're going to pay for that when we get back."

He winks at me. "Ok, daddy."

Suddenly it's very hard to keep a straight face. My mouth tightens with the need to curve upward. He's being disobedient. He's goading me. I should be annoyed. Especially that the idea of punishment doesn't deter him. But I'm not—instead, laughter prickles my throat. North has a way of working his way under my skin, and his attitude is infectious. Being around him makes me feel almost light-hearted at times. But that's often the case with charismatic people, it doesn't mean anything. It isn't a problem.

He doesn't notice my fraction of a smile though, as he twirls the spoon in his hand, distracted.

"So . . . why are you buying me clothes and lunch?" North asks. "How does this all fit in with your rigorous training regime?"

I purse my lips. "Because I like nice things. And since you're one of my *things*, I want you to look nice. Otherwise, people might think I'm hanging around with a hobo."

He rolls his eyes. "You're such an asshole."

"Did I ever give you any indication that I wasn't?"

It's fine if he thinks I'm an asshole. Keep things cold.

He shifts slightly. The remote to the plug is in my pocket. The power I have over him is intoxicating. His pleasure belongs to me. Which is probably why he wants to get a rise out of me. It's his defense mechanism. It must be strange for him to be dominated like this when he's so idolized in all other aspects of his life.

He looks away, fingers still fiddling. He wants to say something and he's building up the courage, so I just wait.

Finally, he speaks. "So, what are we exactly?" He gestures between us, chest to chest. "What is this?"

That's not what I'm expecting. I thought he understood the agreement between us. Has he been going along with it without fully understanding?

"You're not satisfied with our arrangement?"

"No, well, I mean, yeah the . . . *sex*," he looks around and mouths the word like an old woman. "The whole Dom/sub thing we've got going

on, yeah. Great. Amazing. Ten out of ten, would recommend." He gives a nervous laugh. "But, I mean what are we personally? like, are we going out? Am I your boyfriend?" He flicks the straw again and drops his eyes. "Because, like, I'm cool with that if we are."

My reaction is visceral. I'm speechless for a moment, frozen in place, and then my ears start to buzz like he's poked the wasp nest inside my brain. An alarm sounds in my head, screaming at me to back away. There's danger ahead.

Where did this come from? He was just saying what an asshole I am, and now he's asking if we're *boyfriends*? Have I not made myself abundantly clear?

"No," I say. "No, I'm not your *boyfriend*." Just the word makes the panic rise up my chest and makes me want to throw up. "We are not going out. I'm not going to hold your hand and stroke your head while you make daisy chains. We are not going to go on moonlit walks along the beach or go horseback riding. I don't want to meet your parents, or go to your cousin's bar mitzvah, or come to your dad's fucking trailer park BBQ. I just want to fuck you. And I want you to do what I say. And if you have a problem with that, we can stop right now. This is sex, pure and simple. We're not *boyfriends*. We're not even friends."

It's only when I've finished that I realize I'm gripping the edge of the table, hard. My voice has risen to a shout, and he's leaning away, startled. People are glancing over at me. I clear my throat and sit back, running a hand through my hair, trying to steady my now-racing breath, unsure when it sped up so much.

Where did that come from? Why does North make me lose control so quickly? I'm like a hormonal teenager again around him, mood swings at the flip of a switch.

North's cheeks are red. He probably thinks I'm a psycho. The thought of him ending it again is almost as sickening as the word boyfriend.

Should I apologize? Would that look weak? But what if he leaves again?

Before I can figure out my next move, his face creases. Hurt and anger. He glares past my shoulder, not looking me in the face.

"All right. Jesus. I get it. There's no need to tear my fucking head off. It was only a question. If you fucking hate me so much why are we even here."

Have I fucked it up again? I should have known it was going too well. I clear my throat again, choosing the correct words. “North, I–”

“North?” someone calls, cutting me off.

We both look up.

7

-MALCOLM-

PAUL SHANLEY is approaching across the food court, wearing clashing cargo shorts and a polo, and a bemused look on his face. Oh, Christ. Not now. North straightens and his face makes a tremendous effort to transform into his trademark dazzling smile. One second the hurt and anger twists his lips, the next it's gone. If you hadn't been there a few seconds earlier, you'd have no idea I just lost my shit at him.

"Oh hey, Paul," he says like he's genuinely pleased to see him. "How are you doing, man?"

Paul doesn't bother replying to North, instead moving his attention over to me. North doesn't register the rudeness, but it irks me. Add hypocrite to the long list of my faults. I glare back at him, sending him not-so-subtle "fuck off" signals. I need him to leave so I can mend whatever damage I have done with North.

North, being the people person he is, assumes my hostility is because Paul and I don't know each other, and makes introductions.

"Paul, do you know Mal? We're on the team together." He conveniently leaves out the part about me fucking his brains out, which honestly is for the best where Paul is concerned. "Mal this is Paul, he —"

"Lives in your dorm," I finish for him. "I know."

Paul and I have . . . history.

"Oh, do you guys have classes together?"

"No," I say.

North frowns, catching on that something's off between us. There's extra tension in the air. As if it wasn't tense enough already.

Paul's looking between us, his jaw tight. "What are you guys doing?" he says.

I increase the strength of my glare. "We're teammates, we're eating lunch. Do you want something, Paul?" The sharpness of my question could cut glass.

Paul hesitates. I know what he wants—the same thing as the last time I spoke to him. But he isn't going to get it.

While I wait for his answer, I fold my legs, and something falls out of my pocket and clatters onto the floor. I look down in time to see the remote for the plug that is currently in North's ass bounce across the floor to land at Paul's feet. I'm already half standing when Paul bends. His hand closes around it. The slight *click* of a button being pressed. And the next instant North jumps out of his chair with a yelp, one hand slapped to his ass. Heads spin in our direction, and Paul drops the remote like it's hot. I dive and scoop it up, and North sags back into his chair like a puppet with cut strings, hand clapped over his mouth, eyes wide, face bright red, rigid with embarrassment.

I shove the control back into my pocket quickly, but judging by Paul's face he already knows what just happened. And he's furious.

"Are you two f—"

"Fuck off Paul!" I snap.

Paul's mouth clamps shut automatically, obeying my instruction without even thinking. It looks like he's about to say something else, but then he swivels and storms off, his face livid.

I let out a long breath and look around. A few people are still staring in our direction, eager for a whiff of drama, and I glare at them until they turn away one by one.

"Oh shit." North is watching Paul go, his face in a full vivid blush. "Do you think he knows? Fuck." He groans and drops his face into his hands, then looks up again just as quickly, eyes wide. "Shit, what if he tells someone?"

I shake my head. "He won't."

He wouldn't dare.

North doesn't look so confident. "How do you know?" He frowns, a crease between his angled eyebrows. "And what the hell was all that between you guys?"

Any hope that he hadn't noticed vanishes. "We used to know each other."

A wasp buzzes around the sticky sugar on the table. I waft it away, but it hovers. I want to stop talking about goddamn Paul and get back to making sure our agreement is still in place.

The crease between North's brows deepens. "Know each other how?"

Is that a hint of jealousy? The thought gives me a small spark of hope for some reason.

"He isn't important. I need to ap—"

Suddenly North makes a startled noise as the wasp flies at him, and jumps up, knocking his chair over as he scrambles to get away, ducking, bobbing, and weaving, like he's in a boxing match with an invisible opponent. He looks genuinely scared.

"Is it gone?" he asks, looking around wildly, but there's no sign of it anywhere. It must have been as startled as me.

"You're scared of wasps?" I say.

He clears his throat, picks up his chair, and sits back down, still looking around.

"I'm, er, allergic to them actually."

"Allergic?"

"Yeah, not in a swell-up-and-die kinda way, but it's still pretty bad." He still looks spooked. "*Hornets* though, yeah, swell up and die. Big time."

I blink at him. This is news to me. "You didn't think it would be a good idea to tell me that?"

He shrugs, like he just told me something of zero importance. Like it isn't something that could literally kill him.

"Nolan, this is important information. Do you have an EpiPen? I should know where you keep it in case there's an emergency."

"It's in my dorm."

My mouth hangs open.

"What?! You don't have it on you?"

He can't be serious. One sting from an insect could kill him, and he doesn't even carry his EpiPen on him? I knew he wasn't great at looking after himself, but this is a whole new level of suicidal stupidity.

He rolls his eyes, like I'm nagging him about his shirt being untucked. "I'm hardly likely to get stung by a hornet at the mall, am I."

"That doesn't mean it won't happen! You need to take it with you everywhere!"

I can't tell if he's being argumentative because of what I said, or if he really doesn't care about his own welfare.

"The last time I took one out with me I lost it. Do you know how expensive they are?"

I stand up abruptly. "We're going back."

"Where?"

“To get your pen,” I hiss through clenched teeth.

He’s indignant. “But I haven’t finished my chili cheese fries.”

“I don’t fucking care!”

I stride off and after a beat he scoops up his food and jogs after me, looking pissed. By the time we’re back at the car, I’m so angry I’m almost vibrating. If he wants to be mad at me, fine, I deserve it. But when it comes to his safety, I’m not fucking around.

“Get in the car.”

“Fine, but I’m bringing this with me.” He waves his takeaway carton of fat and cheese in the air.

I would murder someone before I let them take food in my car, but right now I couldn’t give one single fuck.

8

-NORTH-

MALCOLM SPEEDS the entire way back to my dorm, staring straight ahead, his face like thunder. I sit slumped in the passenger seat like a scolded child.

He's really pissed. Like really, really pissed. I'm used to him being a grumpy asshole, but I've never seen him this mad before. The way his eyes flash under his lowered brow, the stiff powerful way his body moves, the way he holds his anger in his wide shoulders. I'll never admit it out loud, but it's kinda scary. And also very hot.

What's his problem? So I left my pen at home, so what, those things are damn expensive. Not that he's ever had to worry about money in his entire life. Of course he wouldn't get it, spoiled rich boy. Why does he even care so much anyway? He made it more than clear that he doesn't care about me, or even like me very much.

I glower. He's angry at me? Yeah well, two can play at that game. I'm still pissed at him for ripping my head off when all I wanted to know was if we were going out or not. Excuse me for wanting to be clear. And yeah, it hurt my feelings. Big time. People don't turn me down, like, ever. And it took me more effort than it should have to pluck up the courage to ask. I never get nervous about this shit, but I felt like a kid asking someone to prom for the first time. And not only did he say no, he said hell no with a cherry on top, loudly, in front of a lot of people. My cheeks heat at the thought.

I glare out the window at the passing trees along the side of the road. It is a glorious day, just like I thought it would be, and it looks glummer than ever. What is it about me that is so unlikable to him? We really seemed to be getting on well all morning. I did everything he wanted, and damn it, it really felt like we were vibing for a moment there. Was it just my imagination? Reality replaced with what I actually want? But he smiled, and he *joked.* And the chemistry I felt between us was real, I swear.

But what do I know, I guess I'm an idiot.

I take a sullen spoon of my chili cheese fries every now and then, although it doesn't taste as nice as it did before. Still, it feels good to rebel after what he said. Trailer park BBQ. Fuck him. I don't even live in a trailer park. Anymore. And if my dad had a BBQ no way he'd be invited.

The entire ride back passes in tense silence, and I'm determined not to break it first.

Ten minutes and several broken speed limits later, he storms into my dorm room like a vengeful hurricane.

"Where is it?" he demands.

"In my drawer," I say.

It occurs to me that this is the first time he's been in my dorm room, and it's a complete tip. Clothes, books, and empty wrappers strewn across the floor. The bed is a nest of blankets. And the distinctive odor of unwashed socks fills the air. But he doesn't even like me, so why should I care what he thinks of my pigsty of a room?

He kicks his way through the mess, yanks the door of my bedside table open, grabs the pen, and shoves it into my chest. I grab it, almost knocked backward.

His eyes flash. "I don't want to see you ever leave this room without it again, do you understand?"

"Whatever, Mal, just chill out, man." My heart races.

"Don't call me Mal, my name is Malcolm. And I said do you understand?!" He looks fucking wild.

"Yes, I understand," I say. "Why the hell does it matter to you anyway? You don't give a fuck about me, right? Other than as a way to get your dick wet."

He glares at me, and I think he's going to say something else, but then he closes his mouth, shakes his head, and storms away. He's halfway out of the door when he spins back.

"Your life is worth more than a fucking EpiPen, North!"

The door slams behind him.

9

-MALCOLM-

I'M SO mad. I'm so fucking mad.

I'm mad that he would be so fucking stupid.

And I'm mad that he can make me feel like this.

And I'm mad that I can't keep a hold on myself.

I want to punish him, but I'm so angry I don't know what I'd do. I might go too far and end up hurting him, so it's best to just leave. Get out of here and cool down.

I need to get a grip, but what he did was so fucking infuriatingly stupid. He's mine, and he didn't think to tell me about his allergy? He didn't even bother to bring his EpiPen with him!?

It's insulting.

Doesn't he realize that his death would affect other people? What if that wasp in the food court had stung him? He said they weren't deadly, but what if he had a bad reaction? What if it was actually a hornet? What if he went into anaphylactic shock, and I had no idea what was happening? I have to get out of here.

I storm down the hallway, my throat tight, the pressure building behind my eyes. There's so much going on inside my head, it's a whirlwind of emotions that's just too much for me. I shake my head viciously. I want to shout and punch something. Everything's straining to get out, and it's going for the easiest route; my eyes. They're hot and wet, and I blink tears back furiously.

Fuck. everything just happened too quickly. My explosion. Paul. The pen.

And it was going so fucking well! I didn't even get a chance to apologize for what I said. But if I try now I might just lose it and I can't do that in front of him. Imagine if he saw me crying. Then what would he think? I think that would be even worse than if he did dump me.

But he can't dump me because WE'RE NOT GOING OUT. Shit, how do I get out of here?

"Malcolm! Hey!"

I'm so angry I almost keep going, because I can't see North right now, I'm too mad to speak to him. But my body still stops and turns. It's only when I see who it is that I realize it's not North's voice. Instead, Paul's hurrying after me.

I grind my teeth. What's he doing back here? Did he follow us from the mall?

"Fuck off, Paul," I say.

He jogs the last few steps to close the distance between us. "I need to talk to you."

"And I need you to fuck off."

I go to storm off again, but he snags my arm. "Come on, please."

Blame the adrenaline shooting through my body, but at his touch, my dick remembers what it felt like to be buried inside him. It's too much for my brain to process on top of everything else. My body needs a release, and maybe Paul is the place to get it.

"Fine," I snap, jerking my arm away from him. "But hurry up. I have shit I need to do."

He leads the way into his dorm room. It's the complete opposite of North's room; neat and organized and boring. Lifeless. Kind of like my house. The whole time we had our sessions I never came in here. Looks like I didn't miss out on much.

"How much does an EpiPen cost?" I ask out of the blue.

He frowns. "What?"

"Nothing. What do you want?" I snap.

"Are you and North . . . seeing each other? Are you having sessions?"

"It's none of your business."

He licks his lips. "I want us to try again," he says.

I fold my arms across my chest, unamused. I ended our sessions months ago because Paul wanted me to do things to him that I don't do. It's my own personal rule, and I made that clear, but he wouldn't leave it alone. He kept pushing for it until my irritation at him outweighed the gratification.

"I told you, we don't work together. We both want different things out of the sessions—"

He cuts me off and I glower.

"I won't push you on the whipping thing anymore, I promise." The mention of it makes me twitch. I have my own personal reasons for my limits, and it's nothing he will ever understand.

He moves into my space, and I'm so distracted I let him. A small voice in the back of my head says why not? He wants to, take the release, get your stress out. Me and North aren't exclusive, I made that clear. My blood rises automatically at his proximity, at the promise of taking my pleasure from him.

"I know you're trying to make me jealous with North. And it's working, ok? I want back in."

What? I have to fight the urge to laugh. He's deluded if he thinks that's the reason.

"You think I've started sessions with North, just to make you jealous? Seriously? Paul, I don't care enough about you to do that."

He moves closer to me. My head is raging, my body is tight. Paul looks straight up incredulous, like it's the only logical reason. "Come on, you ended it with me abruptly and then a few months later started a partnership with someone else in my dorm, right in front of me. With the most popular guy in college?" He scoffs "You always hated him. You wouldn't shut up about it."

I look away. Suddenly the rush has passed; my body doesn't want the release, not with Paul, anyway. Yes, I did talk to him about North during our sessions. It's not a coincidence that Paul has similar coloring to him. That was when the release wasn't enough, and I had to rely on fantasies. When I had to run laps and jerk off over him just to clear my head and get some sleep. But now I have the real thing. I have the real North, and he's so much better than the fantasies ever were. And I can't lose that. I need to go back.

Paul shakes his head, still trying to convince himself. "And why else would you take him out for lunch in public? You told me you don't do that. Just two teammates having lunch all casual and buddying up? Yeah right. You wanted me to see you two together. You wanted me to be jealous."

"It's none of your business what I do with my subs. If I want to eat with him, I will."

Now the way he's talking about North is starting to piss me off. North is mine. He doesn't have the right to talk about him. I'm done with this conversation.

"We were great together," Paul says.

"We were pedestrian at best. I'm leaving."

He doesn't move out of my way. His closeness is cloying. "Come on!"

“I don’t know how I can make this any clearer for you, Paul. I’m not interested.”

“I don’t believe you.”

With a grunt, I go to push past him and leave, and he closes his hand around my forearm, circling my wrist. “Hey, Malcolm come on—”

I snatch my arm out of his grip and push him. He stumbles backward and tumbles onto his bed with enough force to make him gasp. But when he looks at me again his eyes are hungry.

“Don’t fucking touch me.” I turn toward the door, and as I leave, he calls after me, his voice echoing down the hall.

“I know what you’re doing with him!”

10

-MALCOLM-

I HOVER at North's door, unsure how to go in. Just going in seems too pushy. Do I knock? Do I call his name? Do I call his phone? Why am I overthinking this so much?

I clench my jaw and knock, and then call his name at the same time.

"Nolan?"

There's a pause long enough for me to think he might not be in there anymore, but then there's the sound of movement and he answers.

"What?"

I'm very aware that I'm standing in the hallway of a shared dorm. "I need to talk to you. Can I come in?" Pause. "Please."

A longer pause. Then the door opens on North, still wearing my clothes that are slightly too big for him, but look great, nonetheless. His face is tight and closed off. Unreadable. I always wanted to wipe that dopey grin off his face, but not like this. I don't like this.

"Can I come in, please?" I ask stiffly. I have no idea what I'm going to say when I do get in, just that I need to fix things. He steps back, allowing me room, then closes the door behind me. The butt plug is on the bed. He's taken it out and cleaned it. Does that mean something? My mind races as I stand in the middle of the messy room with my hands at my sides, and he watches me.

"Well?"

This is possibly the most uncomfortable I have ever felt. But I want to own North, and this is just another step in that. I don't have to be emotional about it, I don't have to make myself vulnerable. I just need to be straightforward. Controlled. Businesslike.

"I want to apologize for my outburst earlier. You caught me off guard, but you have the right to ask questions and know what the situation between us is. I apologize for not making it clearer from the start where we would stand personally." I feel like I'm reading a

teleprompter, looking at a fixed point over his left shoulder. “So, I would like to make it clear now to avoid any further misunderstandings. We are not in an official relationship, but I expect you to be exclusive with me when it comes to sessions, and I will do the same with you. No one else is allowed to Dom you, and I will not participate in any activities with other subs. But we are not in a romantic relationship, and I do not expect you to be exclusive in that respect, if that is something you require elsewhere. If you still agree with this and want to carry on with our arrangement, I would . . . enjoy that.”

There is another longer pause. I want to peel my skin off.

“Also,” the words crawl up out of my throat, dredged up from the deep, “I . . . don’t hate you. If that wasn’t clear from the way I’ve acted.”

I risk a glance at him. He’s got his arms crossed, working his jaw. “Why do you have to be like this with me?”

I steel myself. I can do this. “Like what?”

“Like, one minute we’re having a great time, and then the next”—he shakes his head—“you’re a different person. And you’re fucking *vicious*. I get that you’ve got that dark broody thing going on, and I dig it, but there’s a difference between stoic bad boy and a goddamn walking red flag. It’s like you try to be as hurtful as possible.” He makes a hot noise of frustration and for a panicked moment I think he’s going to cry. “How the fuck am I meant to read all these different signals, Malcolm? You’re all over the place!”

I’m a deer in headlights. I don’t know what to say because, yeah, he’s right. He lets out a long breath and rubs his hand through his hair, pushing the blond strands off his forehead.

“I like you, Malcolm. OK? Like, a lot. I don’t know why, because you’re always such an asshole to me. I guess I’m just dumb or something. But I do. And if you don’t want it to be more than it is then that’s fine, I won’t push you. But that’s all you had to say.”

My throat is so tight I can feel my heart pounding in it. I don’t know what to do, I don’t know what to say, I don’t even know what to think.

“To be honest I don’t know if I should be mad, or concerned, because there’s obviously something wrong with your head that makes you like this.”

I feel like if I move or speak, something terrible is going to happen to me. Danger lies on all sides. But if I just stand here and let his words wash over me, maybe I can survive. I can keep it all in and deal with it in private later.

North looks down at his shoes. “I mean, I get that I was stupid not taking the EpiPen out, so, I guess I’m not that mad about that. But I just want to know, why do you care so much?” His voice turns hopeful at the end.

Ok. that was a direct question. Time for me to speak. My throat works.

Say something.

My voice croaks on the words. “Because I . . . care about . . . your well-being.”

He watches me for a moment, his eyes searching my face. Something in me tells me I need to hold his gaze, so I stare back into them. They’re so blue. So different to mine.

Finally, he nods. “Ok.”

“OK?”

There’s a long pause. I can’t tell if he’s forgiven me or not. I hate it when I can’t read him.

He nods. “Ok. But if you make me feel like shit again, I’m out. For good.”

“Understood,” I say. Trying not to sag with relief. It’s over. I did it. Now I need to go and deal with everything somewhere else. “So, I will see you later. At the game.”

“Right.” He nods, one side of his mouth lifting in a half-hearted smile.

What happens now? I feel like there’s something else I should do, but I don’t know what. So I just leave, stiff as a robot. The heavy feeling of relief weighs down on me, and his words are a solid rock in my stomach.

I’ve fixed my mess, but I’ve got a whole lot to think about. And something else hovers at the front of my mind. For a moment back there, when he told me he likes me, I thought he was going to try to kiss me again.

And I don’t know if I’m relieved he didn’t . . . or disappointed.

MARKED BY MY TEAMMATE

1

-NORTH-

IT'S FOUR hours since I told Malcolm Blackwood that I like him, and four hours since he made it clear he wasn't interested. At least not in the way I want him to be.

Four hours since he told me he doesn't hate me, and he cares about "my welfare," whatever that means.

Now as I make my way to the locker room, my nerves are jangling, and it's got nothing to do with the big game. After everything that happened today I have no idea what to expect when I see him. From Mal, or from me. But what's new, right?

It feels like all I've done since we started this whole confusing agreement is try to figure out what's going on behind his impassive face. His annoyingly sexy impassive face.

My head is a sludge of different emotions jammed with everything we said, and everything we didn't say. I told him I like him. Which, come on, was no easy feat considering how unpredictable Malcolm is at the best of times. Last time I said something like that he lost his shit. But it's not only that, this is big for me, too. I've had to do some serious soul searching about whether I even *like* guys—surprise, guess I do!—and if I want anything to do with Mal after everything that's happened—surprise again, I do. Self-preservation? I don't know her.

This sure as hell isn't how I saw my college life playing out—all of this was a low tackle out of left field—but my heart is strapped in for the ride, and there's no getting off now. Call me crazy, but I don't want to get off. Now I just need to get him on board too.

Yeah, like that's ever gonna happen.

My duffelbag bumps against my hip as I walk, making the strap rub against the sore spot at the base of my neck. The spot where Mal sucked and bit my flesh until it was red and raw. In the middle of a forest. While I was handcuffed to a tree. My pulse surges at the memory. Damn. Now is not the time to get horny.

I sigh. I must be literally out of my mind to like him so much, but he's just so . . . intense. Yeah he's stiff and emotionally repressed as hell, but he's got an urgency to him, an energy that flies between us and fills my veins with throbbing electricity whenever I see him. He makes me feel alive.

Plus, he's hot as hell, which doesn't help matters.

I trace my fingers over the hickey. What would it be like if he just pulled that stick out of his ass and learned to relax and enjoy himself?

Would he like me back the way I want him to? I want to send him funny memes. I want to go to the movies with him and share a bucket of popcorn. I want to shove that popcorn up my nose and shoot it at him. I want to talk about sports, sitting in our boxers and socks after a day of classes. I want to make him laugh. A proper belly laugh, not that snort of derision he does when he's trying to pretend humor is beneath him.

I want to slide my hand up his back, feel the soft bump of his scar under my fingertips.

And dammit, I want to kiss him more than once a day and have him kiss me back without freaking out.

I want him, more than I've wanted anyone. Talk about pathetic.

When I finally get to the locker room door, I pause and take a deep steadying breath.

He cares about me. He told me himself. And for Mal that's a pretty big deal. So that'll have to do for now.

I go in. Inside it's packed. The team is getting ready for the big game, laughing and joking as they get into their gear. A few of the guys look up as I enter, and cheer.

"Here he is!" Danny shouts, throwing a balled-up sock in my direction. I deflect it.

"What took you so long, Alaska? Thought we were gonna have to go on without you," Josh says.

The nickname is from the old song. It got bestowed on me my first game at Langley, and it's stuck ever since. It's not the worst name I could have gotten, just ask Fapper, and I actually quite like the song now.

"Yeah, and get our butts handed to us," Randy adds, readjusting his pads across his chest.

I roll my eyes and laugh as I walk past them, aiming a kick at Danny's butt, but it's half-hearted with how tight my chest feels.

Then I see Malcolm and everything else fades into the background. He seems to be back to his old self, leaning against my locker, already in his football gear, arms crossed. The wide padded shoulders make him look even more intimidating and my heart does a little double tap. His dark hair falls over his forehead, and the sharp line of his jaw is shadowed, mirroring the sharp line of his mouth. I will never get over how good he looks. Did I really go through my whole life thinking I was straight? Because *wow*.

He watches me with his dark-brown eyes as I drift toward him, pulled in by his gravity, and he shifts over to make room for me, pushing away from my locker with his elbow while maintaining eye contact. My skin tingles all over.

"Hey," I say. "Did you get ready early just so you could hang around looking mysterious?"

He doesn't smile at my joke, but something softens in his eyes. Relief? Has he been agonizing over what happened as much as I have?

That energy he radiates is filling up my veins, and all my doubts are disintegrating again. This happens every damn time. This is why I'm such an idiot when it comes to him, I just can't keep my head.

"Are you going to move so I can get into my locker? Or do I have to earn it?" I say in a low teasing voice, for his ears only.

He raises one eyebrow a fraction, as if the idea appeals to him, but then tilts his head in the direction of the showers.

"Right now?" I hiss.

I glance around. It doesn't look like anyone is paying us any attention, but the room is full. What if someone sees us?

He opens his mouth—

A hand slaps the lockers between us, with an almighty *CLANG,* and I nearly jump out of my skin, and then Jason is leaning in, grinning at me. Where the hell did he come from?

"Hey, Alaska, you coming to my kegger right?" he says.

I plaster a grin across my face. "You know it, bro."

"Sweet, I've got a whole keg with your name on it!" Jason raises his hand for a high five.

Behind him, Mal raises an eyebrow—he still hasn't taken his eyes off me—and I laugh tightly and high-five Jason, trying not to go bright red. Mal said I couldn't drink without his permission, but what else can I

say? *Sorry, I've given full control to the guy fucking me and he says I can't*?

A moment later Jason seems to notice Mal looming right behind him, and his face drops. Mal can have that effect on people; most of the team are either in awe of him or scared of him.

"Oh, hey Malcolm, I didn't see you there. You can totally come, too, if you want to."

Malcolm blinks at him, one long slow movement, and Jason ducks his head and scurries away.

"You coming, *bro*?" Malcolm says, heading toward the showers. I duck my head and go after him, heart pounding. The mass of bodies part for him, and he leads the way into the far stall in the shower block.

"Have you got the plug?"

"Er, yeah."

He takes the bag off my shoulder and unzips it.

"Take your pants off."

Straight to the point in true Malcolm form. I almost choke on my spit, but that doesn't stop me whipping my pants off like there's a venomous spider in them.

"Turn around and bend over," he says, pulling a bottle of lube out.

I do as he says and a moment later the cold drizzle of lube down the crack of my ass makes me flinch.

The tip of the plug presses against my hole, and then he starts to work it in, stretching me out a little at a time. The noise from the rest of the team is barely muted by the shower walls, any one of them could walk in here any second and see me, bent over while Mal pushes a butt plug into my ass. I cover my face with my arm.

He leans over my shoulder as he works it inside me and talks quietly into my ear.

"You took this out earlier without my permission. I'll allow it this time, but never do it again. I own this hole."

Oh god, he knows exactly what to say to get my pulse racing. I bite down on my lip and try not to make a sound as it fills me and my rim of muscle closes around its base.

"I want to own you on the field tonight. No one will know that under your clothes you're filled and mine." He twists the base and gives it a shove, and my body lurches. "And then when it's over and you've won us the game like I know you will, I'm going to take this plug out, and fill

you all over again." His hand ghosts over my dick and I hiss. "Win this game for us, and I'll let you come first."

Shit, if that isn't motivation to play my best I don't know what is. I'm already itching to get out there and show him how good I can play for him.

He pulls my sweatpants back up with a snap. "But don't think I'm letting you off easily though. I'm still going to punish you for being such a fucking idiot earlier."

Ah, yeah. The whole EpiPen thing. I nod dumbly, and his eyes fall to my lips. I want to kiss him, but I've used up my kiss for today. Maybe I should just do it anyway and face the punishment.

But before I can do anything, he moves away and the space around me feels empty without him taking it up.

"Now get ready."

Right. I've got a game to win.

***

Ten minutes later, I walk out onto the field with the rest of the team, butt plug filling me, as the crowd cheers. It feels dirty wearing it in front of so many people, and the thrill makes my dick stiffen inside the jock strap, adding to the pre-game exhilaration.

The captains step forward to call the coin toss. While we wait, I catch Mal's eye and he gives me a knowing look, and my face heats, as well as other various body parts. It's our dirty secret. And god, it's hot.

I look away. A sign saying "*GO Langley Green Hawks*" in big green letters near the front of the bleachers catches my eye. Becki shakes it and waves at me, eyes bright with excitement, and I smile and wave back.

We lost the toss, and the Rangers defer, so we form our lines for the kickoff. A heavy hush falls across the stadium.

The whistle blows. The kicker takes his run up. The ball sails into the air. And I'm running, adjusting my route to meet the ball. It slots into my hands, and I sprint. The Rangers charge forward, meeting us in a clash of bodies. I search for my gap, and slip between two bodies, avoiding the hands that grab for me.

I make some good headway up the field before a Ranger barrels into me and takes me out. The land is hard with his weight on top of me, and the plug shifts and presses against a spot deep inside me. I gasp.

He doesn't seem to notice my reaction as he climbs off, and thank fuck the helmet masks my expression, because I can't stop the heat that's radiating up my neck. The Ranger pulls me back up onto my feet, gives me a nod, and jogs off. I take a deep breath and shake it off. No one knows.

We line up for the first down. I take my position behind the quarterback, hunched and ready.

Despite the butt plug, my mind is clear, each movement flowing like clockwork from years of practice. This is what I'm good at; I might not be the best academically, I might not be the tallest, and I might not be the biggest. But football is like breathing. It comes naturally to me—the feel of turf under my cleats, the noise of the crowd, my teammates around me. It all feels like home.

My heart thrums and I take a slow breath in and out as the adrenaline courses through me, my body primed and ready to go. These pauses between plays stretch out into silent oceans.

And then. Snap. The play starts.

The quarterback gets the ball, passes off to me. I tuck it under my arm, my cleats dig into the turf. I shoot off. Bodies collide in front of me. Ahead, I spot Mal, his wide back straining. A gap opens to the left and I go for it. An arm grabs at my waist, but I twist away from it. And then the field opens up and I let loose. My limbs pump. The ground disappears beneath my feet. The ball sits safely cradled in my arm.

Someone comes at me from the right, and I sidestep and spin around them. But the sound of pounding feet is right behind me. Then, out of nowhere, a meaty shoulder smacks into my side, and I smash into the ground, instinctively keeping the ball close. The weight lifts and I push myself back to my feet, looking around as time slows down again. I've gained enough for the first down.

Someone claps me on the shoulder. "Great play, Alaska."

I slap him back, and we make our way to line up again.

On the way, Malcolm jogs up to me. "You good?"

"Yeah, all good." I flex my shoulders and neck, feeling limber and loose, and he takes me in and nods.

The next few downs, the quarterback throws a pass play, pushing the ball down the field to the receiver, each time gaining more ground before they're taken out.

We're doing good, pushing down the field bit by bit and when it's my turn to take the ball again, I'm eager to add to it.

The quarterback passes off to me, the ball slots into my hands, and I'm gone. Round to the right this time, around the horde of bodies. Malcolm breaks from the mess and flanks me, arms pumping, and I feel invincible with him there. Because nothing can stand in his way. He isn't the biggest player on the field, but his sheer drive makes him a goddamn freight train.

We move together, and with every step the plug shifts inside me. It should be distracting, but it's a buzz that feeds the fire inside me, keeping me on my toes and out of my head.

The Ranger's safety charges from the left, his huge head down, arms wide, ready to take me out. But I have Malcolm. He surges ahead like a homing missile, and slams into the player with his full weight, driving him into the ground with those powerful shoulders. I leap, jumping clear over both of them as they roll. For a second, I'm airborne and weightless. Then my feet thud down, I twist my cleats into the turf and I'm away, the field open in front of me.

The roar of the crowd is a muted hum in my ears as I stretch out, fly up the field into the end zone, and score the first touchdown.

The crowd goes wild. I fling my arms up and throw myself into a one-handed cartwheel, basking in the glow of it. This feeling is almost as good as sex. A moment later, the other Hawks slam into me, taking me off my feet.

"Yes! You're a beast!"

"North, you fucking rock star."

Sometimes it's a hard slog, but I must admit, I love the adoration. The shouts and cheers feed me. But all of that dims when Malcolm catches my eye and smiles. It's a small and controlled thing, the faintest curling of his lips just visible under his helmet. But it makes me beam with the power of a thousand suns.

The first three quarters fly by, and by the start of the fourth, we're ahead by ten points. But the Rangers play a mean game, and they claw it back until we're all tied up.

Now there are only a few minutes left on the clock, we're in possession, the end zone within reach, and everything to play for.

“We’re gonna run it,” the quarterback says as we huddle together.

“Are you sure?” I say.

“Yeah, their safeties and cornerbacks are on their A game, but the D-line is gassed. It shouldn’t be too hard to get you through, get you a good shot at the end zone.”

Ok, this one’s on me then. I take a deep breath.

“You good for this, North?”

“Yeah, I got this.”

“That’s right. Let’s show them who we are.”

I shake out as we take our places, feeling an unusual bout of nerves. I need to make this play. Everyone’s depending on me, everyone’s watching. But it’s more than that, Malcolm is expecting me to win. And the promise of the reward hangs over my head. Somehow that’s more pressure than the team or the crowd watching.

God, I’d kill for a smoke.

I shift, the plug moves inside me, and it brings me back to the moment with a jolt. I’m overthinking. I just need to relax and do what I do. Slow breath in. Slow breath out.

The down starts. The center snaps the ball, the quarterback hands it off to me, and I run.

He was right. The Rangers’ linemen falter under the attack and a gap opens up, just wide enough for me to fit. I slip through, running with everything in me. One of their linemen closes in on me, angling so that our paths meet a few yards ahead. I alter my course, veering away. But a hand shoves me from behind, grasping to find purchase, tipping me forward. It slips away but it’s enough to knock my balance off. I stumble and try to get my legs back in order. Before I can, the lineman coming from the other direction crashes into me and gets his arms hooked around my waist. My breath slams out of me, and I fall, dragged down by the guy’s weight, twisting as I go. Time slows. I’m going down. And I was so close to the end zone.

No. Mal is expecting me to win. So, I’m going to fucking win.

Because god dammit, I want my reward.

My free hand shoots out, stopping my descent with one hand and one foot on the ground. I twist and jerk forward, carried by the momentum. The guy’s grip loosens. I shove up and forward, hard, with all my strength. A tangle of limbs. The weight falls away, my legs driving under me, pushing me forward, almost parallel to the ground. Grass

skims my fingers. And then, somehow, I'm out and upright and running again, leaving the Ranger scrambling behind me.

Four yards.

Three.

I'm going to make it.

Two.

One.

The crowd surges up as I hit the end zone, roaring almost as loud as the buzz of adrenaline in my ears. I made it. We won.

I hunch for a moment with my hands on my knees and drag breaths in through the stuffy helmet. Then my eyes find Malcolm, the blazing lights outlining him in a halo. I shout and step forward to launch myself at him. I want to wrap my arms around him and lift him off the floor. But then the guys rush to huddle around me, and Mal hangs back, separate from everyone like always. With us, but apart.

I accept the praise and high fives from my team, but there's only one person I want to tell me that I did good. Through the press of bodies, I catch sight of him again, and he gives me a nod and a goddamn genuine smile, and my heart hammers in response. That small acknowledgment is more exhilarating than the entire crowd of cheering people.

The team drag me off the field, back toward the locker room, with Mal still some way behind us. A few of the guys break out into song as we go, absolutely murdering the lines.

"North to Alaska, we go north, the rush is oooooon!"

I manage to make my way to the back of the group and linger there, waiting for Malcolm to catch up.

Suddenly there's a high-pitched shout behind me. Becki runs at me out of nowhere, launches herself like a bottle rocket, and flings her arms around my neck, swinging her feet off the ground. I stumble back a step, caught by surprise.

"Whoa—"

She squeals again, directly into my ear, and her long chestnut hair flicks into my open mouth. I spit it out.

"Oh my god, North, that was amazing! You were so good!"

She's heavier than she looks, and I hunch, putting her feet back on the ground, but she doesn't let go. I'm suddenly very aware of the plug and clench up around it. I'd die from embarrassment if she found out.

"Thanks, Becki," I say.

Tammi and Staci are holding the "*GO Langley Green Hawks*" sign off to one side, making similar high-pitched noises and jumping up and down.

"I don't even know how you can do that, North," Tammi says.

"You're definitely the best player on the team," Staci says.

I smile at them. "Thanks, guys, it wasn't all me though. Team effort and all that."

Becki is still clinging onto me, and I try to twist in her grip to locate Mal again. I can't see him anywhere. Has he gone into the locker room already? The need to see him is all consuming.

Becki's saying something and I zone back in to catch the end of it.

"—or sometime, like I'm free this weekend?"

"Huh?" I grunt.

"If you want to?" She's looking up at me, waiting. She wants an answer, but I have no idea what she just said. I frown, trying to go back over what I heard. Something about a drink.

Wait? Is she asking me out? I blink at her, now paying full attention. She's smiling up at me and her friends are watching. Waiting for an answer.

Maybe a few weeks ago I would have jumped at the chance, but now? I just want to find Mal. But my mind blanks, and I can't think of a good reason to say no.

"I, uh, I have a lot going on at the moment, studying, practice, and . . ." Getting fucked by Mal. I trail off.

"Ok, but I'm sure you can spare a couple of hours for me. I could come over to your place and help you study." She moves in a way that pushes her soft boobs against me. She does have nice boobs, I guess.

What do I say? Malcolm made it very clear we weren't together in that way, and I could date anyone I wanted. So that means I'm available right? Do I even want to be available?

I haven't thought about trying to date anyone else up until this exact moment. Becki's nice, and a bit of healthy attention might actually be good for me.

She plants a kiss on my cheek, her lips soft and warm in a way that I wish Malcolm's were. I close my eyes briefly and try to imagine it's him but it's all wrong, Becki is far too soft, sweet, and small to ever be him. I open my eyes again and freeze.

Malcolm's standing near the entrance to the locker room, his helmet under his arm, his dark hair messy and damp. He's watching

us, eyes wide, lips parted like he's frozen in the act of speaking. Then all at once his face closes off.

My heart drops.

"I have to go," I say, pushing Becki off me, but she keeps one arm hooked around mine.

"But what about this weekend?" she says.

I hesitate, I have to give her some kind of answer so she'll let me go.

"Erm, I-yeah, maybe. I'll let you know, ok?" She frowns, and I finally slip my arm free. "I have to go."

But when I look up again, Malcolm's gone.

2

-MALCOLM-

THE MOMENT Becki's lips touch his skin, every cell in my body freezes. Her arms are thrown around his wide shoulders, hanging off his neck, with one leg kicked back. And North's half-hunched over her, his sweat-slicked hair spiked, and leaning into her kiss with his eyes slightly closed. Savoring it.

The noises around me mute to a dull ringing in my ears, and I feel like I've been punched in the stomach.

While I watch, transfixed, he opens his eyes and looks up over the top of her head. Our eyes meet for a split second and guilt flashes across his face. And for a moment I forget how to breathe.

I spin and march toward the locker room, my whole body rigid, until the concrete wall stands between us, then stop and lean against it.

They look so good together, the perfect all-American dream.

My throat feels tight. Why do I need to get my breath back, like I've taken a gut punch? This is fucking ridiculous. I specifically told him he could go out with other people if he wanted. I made it very clear that we weren't romantically involved and that he was available. That's what I said to him.

After he said he liked me.

Yeah, and I shot him down because I don't do relationships. Remember?

I fight to get my chest to expand, draw the air in. The pads feel too restrictive, and I want to tear them off.

It doesn't make any sense. I have no reason to feel like this.

I push away from the wall and work to unclench my fists as I move down the hallway toward the locker room. If North wants to kiss popular preppy girls then he's welcome to. It has nothing to do with me.

A shout comes from behind me, over the noise of the team laughing and talking as they make their way back to the locker room.

"Hey! Malcolm!"

North hurries after me, carrying his helmet under his arm, cleats clacking on the tiles. I want to keep on walking, but I have no reason to be pissed at him, so I stand and watch him jogging toward me.

"Sorry about that, Becki just kinda came out of nowhere—"

I shrug and cut him off. "OK."

I don't want to hear his apologies or excuses, I don't want to care. I keep on walking, and he skips to catch up, trying to get in front of me to see my face.

"Are you upset?"

Yes.

"No. Why would I be upset?"

"Oh. Ok," he says. "It's just, on the field you looked kinda upset."

I need him to stop talking. I need to change the subject. I need to remind him what's important here, and it sure as fuck isn't Becki or some insignificant kiss.

The door to the equipment closet is behind him, and I spin and reach around him, jerking it open and dropping my helmet. I smack his out of his surprised hands, and it hits the floor and rolls away. With one shove he trips backward, catching himself against the row of shelves just inside the door. His hand knocks a stack of cones, sending them to scatter across the floor. I follow him in and close the door behind me, catching a glimpse of his face before the light cuts off.

It's dark in here, and North is a warm shadowy shape in front of me, the sound of his breathing loud in the sudden quiet. As my vision adjusts I can just make out his wide eyes, reflecting the scrap of light that slips in under the door. He's waiting for me to speak. He's already fallen back into the familiar sub space so easily, with just the slightest push. I let the moment drag out, enjoying it. Becki might be able to kiss him, but can she do this to him?

He keeps silent, waiting, ready for my instructions.

"To be honest, Nolan, I'm not sure what to do with you right now. You played that game like a fucking pro. But I still need to punish you for being an idiot with your EpiPen." He makes a noise, small and needy, that gives me a rush. The power I have over him is like a drug. "So do I reward you, or punish you first?"

North gulps, his Adam's apple bobbing. I step closer to him and place my hand around his neck, feeling the way his throat moves and the way his skin burns. Possessive where Becki was clingy.

"Well? I asked you a question."

“Reward,” he croaks, then clears his throat. “Reward first, please.”

“OK.”

I push him backward by the throat and he goes easily, his cleats tapping on the floor. The back of his calves meet an old wooden bench, and he sits with a creak.

“Don’t move.”

I search around the room for something I can use. I didn’t plan to do this here, but after seeing him with Becki . . . well, plans change. So I’m going to have to improvise. On one of the shelves is a box of jump ropes. I pull some free and turn back to him, straightening them between my hands as he watches me while gripping the edges of the bench.

“Lie down.”

When he’s on his back, I pull his arms underneath the bench, then tie his wrists together with one of the jump ropes. He shifts against them, small, excited movements that make me want to flip him over and fuck him hard right here.

Instead, I ease his shoes off one at a time and throw them behind me, where they crash into something. He stifles a snort, and I can’t help smiling. I jerk his pants off, tear away his jock strap, then spread his legs, with his feet on the floor on either side of the bench. Now he’s lying with his hands tied beneath him, naked from the waist down, with his cock standing long and hard. The fact that he’s still wearing his gear on his top half only accentuates his nakedness, and makes the scene look even more obscene.

I stand over him. “OK, I’ll give you your reward first. And I’m going to let you decide your own punishment.”

He’s staring up at me, his hair splayed out on the bench around his head. “I know there’s a catch to that,” he says, breathless and amused. Smart boy.

“I’m going to suck you off,” I say. He makes a choking noise, his shaky intake of breath is enough to make my own cock twitch. I haven’t sucked anyone off in years, but for some reason I feel the need to do it now. But why? Becki’s lips on his cheek flash through my head and I push it away. “And then, after you’ve come, I’m going to punish you. But it’s up to you how long the punishment lasts. Every time you make a noise while I’m blowing you, I’m going to add half an hour to your punishment. Understand?”

“Oh, god. Ok. But I don’t think I’m gonna have much opportunity to make any noises, I’m pretty sure I’m going to explode in record time.”

I smirk. I know he’s joking, but the chance to tease him is too good. “Well then, I’ll just have to see how long I can make it last. Really draw it out.”

“Oh, god,” he mutters.

He already sounds wrecked, and I haven’t even touched him yet. I’d like to see wholesome Becki have this effect on him. I pinch the bridge of my nose. Stop thinking about Becki!

“Safeword?” I say.

“Baseball.”

“Safe signal?”

He snaps his fingers and it rings out in the quiet space.

“Every noise you make,” I remind him, settling between his spread knees on the bench, and running my tongue over my lips. “So you better keep quiet.”

3

-NORTH-

THE WARM wetness of his mouth closing around my cock is so good that I almost come on the spot. The only thing holding me back is the sheer shock of what's happening. Because Malcolm Blackwood, the Malcolm Blackwood, is giving me a blow job. My dick is in his mouth and his lips are sliding down the length as he takes me in and—fuck!

I've fantasized about this so many times in the past few weeks that it's not even funny. but now it's really happening. And the reality is so much better than anything I could imagine.

The tip of his tongue flicks over my head and then runs down the bottom of my shaft as his lips slide down again, and I choke.

I stare down at him along the length of my body, unable to take my eyes off the top of his head as it moves up and down, his dark hair swaying. His hands grip my hips, pinning me in place as he gives me the best blow job I've ever had in my entire life. *Fuck*. I want it to last as long as possible but I'm on the edge already, breathing heavily as I struggle to keep the noises fighting to get out inside. But then he tilts his head and looks up at me, his fierce eyes hot under his lashes. My brain short circuits, and I can't stop a shuddering groan from escaping my loose lips.

He hums around my cock, sending a vibration through me that makes my hairs stand on end, and taps a finger on my hip before holding it up. *Strike one.* Shit. I try to press my lips together, unable to muffle myself with my hands tied under the bench.

His hand doesn't go back to my hip, instead he slides it over my belly and slips it up my top, under the pads and undershirt, until he finds my nipple. His finger flicks over it. My lips shake. Then he pinches and twists, and I can't help the keening noise that comes out of me. Again, the hum that turns my legs to jelly. Again, the tap to my hip and two fingers raised. Shit. He's only just started and I'm already up to an hour. This is pure torture, but I don't want it to stop.

I bite down on my lips as he draws all the way back to the tip and pauses before he slides all the way down again. Slow and steady. I swear he's getting slower, trying to tease another noise out of me. A whine builds up in my chest, trapped there as he keeps the agonizingly slow rhythm going, drawing up, letting me hang, before sliding down again. I try to push up into his mouth, desperate for more. But his grip on my hips tightens, holding me down on the bench.

Finally it's too much, it all just feels too good. My brain has turned to mush. I plead and moan, trying to thrust up against him into the deep, warm tightness of his mouth. I don't care about the time penalties anymore. It just feels too good. The punishment is future North's problem, not mine. All I care about is chasing that warmth and the bliss that shoots through me. He picks up the pace and my mouth hangs open.

"Ugh! Shit, that feels so good."

I don't even know how many taps I'm getting now, all I'm aware of is the feel of his mouth on me and the sweet tension pooling at the base of my spine, growing and growing until I can't hold it anymore.

The dam bursts. My legs shake as my body arches up off the bench and I spill into his mouth in great rolling waves. My head rolls to the side, eyes unseeing, and I groan long and loud. Every muscle in my body clenches and uncoils, then clenches again, until finally I melt into a puddle of bliss. Once I finish he pulls off and shows me four fingers. I'm sure I earned more than that, but my stomach still drops. *Two hours*. Shit. Now I'm future North and it's my problem. But I can't blame pre-orgasm North, it was totally worth it. I'm going to replay that blowjob in my mind forever.

I lie on the bench, my limbs liquid, waiting for my head to stop spinning. Wow.

He pushes himself up and leans over my body, then wraps his hand around my jaw and squeezes, hinging it open. I open my mouth, and he hovers his face over mine, lips pursed. For a moment I think he's going to kiss me. Then a line of cum dribbles from his lips and pools on my tongue, salty and bitter. He keeps going, passing all of my cum into my mouth until it's full, then pushes it closed.

"Keep it in your mouth," he says. "Taste yourself."

I let it sit on my tongue, the warm fluid tangy.

"Wait here."

He gets up, the door opens and closes with a flash of light, and then I'm alone in the gloom with my cock lying against my bare thigh, tied to the bench, my mouth full of my own cum. Where's he going? Is this my punishment? I shift and the bench creaks.

But he reappears again a moment later, carrying his bag over his shoulder. He drops it onto the bench between my knees and opens it. After the flash of light from outside I can't make out what he's doing until cold metal presses against my sensitive cock and balls, making me flinch. The cage. He locks it into place, then stands over me.

"How do you taste?" he asks, knowing I can't answer. I glare at him. Is he going to let me spit it out? Surely he's not going to make me keep it in my mouth for the whole two hours. I move the cum around with my tongue, humiliated and already aroused again. I should find it disgusting, because it is. It makes me feel so pathetic and powerless and hopelessly horny. How does he do this to me?

He takes a length of rope from the bag and ties it around my ankles, fastening them under the bench so my legs are pulled tight around it and my knees spread with the edges of the bench digging into the inside of my legs and thighs. The ropes slide against my skin, smooth and strong.

Once he's finished he steps back, taking in his work. I shift again.

"Now you can swallow."

Relieved, I close my eyes and gulp, and it slides down my throat in a lump, leaving behind a greasy residue on my tongue and a bitter aftertaste. It tastes nothing like his cum.

I'm getting edgy now, I want to ask what my punishment is, but if I speak will he add more time? If I know him, two hours is going to be bad enough, I don't want to add to it.

He rummages in the bag again and brings something up to my face. Soft fabric pushes between my lips and tightens as he ties it around the back of my head, tugging at some strands of hair.

I make a muffled noise through the gag as he pulls something else out, and then there's fabric over my eyes and I really can't see anything.

"Comfy? You're going to stay here for two hours, alone in the dark, so you can really think about what you did."

I make a noise. The punishment isn't as bad as I feared, there has to be another catch.

“I should be leaving you for longer, because you really made a lot of noise, but you played so well I’m cutting you some slack. You can thank me later.”

His hand moves through my hair, almost gentle, then there’s a long moment of silence. So long that I wonder if he’s already gone. I move my head, trying to make out any noises.

Something touches my hand under the bench and I jump, but it’s only Mal pressing something into my fingers that’s small, hard, and squarish. Some kind of beeper? He positions my index finger on what feels like a button.

“Press this and I’ll come back.”

Is he actually going to leave me here like this? What if someone comes in and finds me? I pull against the ropes, but they hold fast and my cock tries to fill inside the cage at the prospect of it as my body flushes hot.

I hear him walk off, turning my head to track the sound. Is that it? Leaving me like this is humiliating, but just lying here for a few hours, even though I’ll get uncomfortable, isn’t that bad. I expected more from him. The noise stops, and I can picture him standing in the doorway looking back at me. Suddenly the plug in my ass jumps to life, sending a shock through me. I gasp and my eyes fly wide behind the blindfold. I almost forgot it was in somehow after everything that happened. The vibration starts low and grows slowly, sending a buzz through my core that’s impossible to ignore, like an electric current directly on my exposed nerves. I squirm.

“See you later, Nolan.”

The door closes.

4

-MALCOLM-

I CLOSE the door and watch him squirming on the bench. Of course I'm not going to leave him alone like this for two hours, that would be stupidly dangerous, there's too much risk of something going wrong while he's tied up. But he doesn't know that. As far as he's concerned he's been left like this, alone and vulnerable, being edged by the plug.

I settle down with my back against the wall, make myself comfortable and get my phone out. I've got two hours to kill. The next moment my phone goes off in my hand and I hurriedly mute it before it can give me away. I glare at it. Who the hell is texting me?

Josh: Drinks at Rocky's to celebrate the win!! See you there?

Me: Sure.

I'm not going to Rocky's, I'd rather grate off my own fingerprints than drink watered down beer with a room full of drunk meatheads. But it's easier to pretend to go along with it, they'd probably be more shocked if I actually showed up.

Josh: Awesome. You seen North anywhere? We wanna buy him a round.

I look up at North, half naked and tied to the bench.

Me: No.

There's something delicious about him tied up, helpless and squirming in the dark, while the rest of the team go out to celebrate his big win.

I check the time. One hour and fifty minutes to go.

The noises he makes around the gag are fucking hot. So needy and desperate. I watch the lines of his body tense and shift, and try not to

think about Becki's lips on his cheek, and the way he smiled at her.

Does he like her? Why wouldn't he? I'm sure she's very attractive if you're into that kinda thing. That kinda thing being girls. I drag my wrist across my mouth, the tang of North still fresh on my tongue.

Is North into that kinda thing? I've never actually asked him, but it seemed obvious. I've seen them flirting plenty of times before. Does he like her? She's very different from me. I don't think it's possible to be any more different.

But he can like who he wants. I told him that. We're not . . . involved like that. So he can like who he wants.

Except . . . he said he liked *me.*

Apart from the fact that I have no idea why he would like me outside of a decent fuck, there's an even bigger question here. Could he like me and Becki at the same time, when we're so different? I lean back against the wall. Why am I even thinking about this? It's up to him who he likes.

About forty minutes in, his noises get more erratic and disjointed, and I sit upright. Are those sounds of distress? The noises grow more desperate, and I'm about to go over to check on him when he writhes, the muscles of his legs straining, pulls against the ropes, and groans loudly as his hips move in small, aborted thrusts. He grunts once more, a long drawn-out noise, before falling back limply onto the bench, panting through his nose. I raise my eyebrows. It looks like he's just had an epic orgasm in the cage. He must really like the idea of being left like this. I make a mental note to recreate it later in the safety of my own house. It'll be interesting to see how many times I can make him come while caged, with the right motivation.

I sit back down and wait.

When two hours is up I rise silently, open the door, and slam it shut again. He jumps, turning his head toward me as I move over to him.

I loosen the blindfold and the gag, turn off the vibrations, and he takes a deep breath. His face is flushed, pink, and dewy, his hair a mess. Cum leaks from his caged cock and pools on the bench between his legs.

"So, did you learn your lesson?" I say.

"Yes."

"Will you do it again?"

"No, sir."

Sir? That's new. I'm not sure what I think about that. I suppose I should have an official name during our sessions, and "sir" is a popular one. Something to think about.

"Good. Oh, one last thing."

I lean over him and press my mouth to the side of his throat, higher than the mark already there from earlier in the woods. I suck his skin into my mouth and work it, biting and licking. He grunts and tilts his head to the side, allowing me better access. When I'm done there's a livid red mark halfway up the side of his neck. It's high enough that it'll be hard to conceal. I look down at it. Why did I do that?

Once he's released I wipe him down with a towel from my bag, cleaning away the sticky cum from his thighs, then help him into his pants. He groans as he sits up, working the blood back into his limbs.

"Come on," I say. "You need a shower."

***

Water runs over his body as I rub him down, the sleeves of my undershirt rolled up. It'd be easier to take my own clothes off, too, and wash us both at the same time, but I'll have a shower after him. I'd rather keep my clothes on.

I can't get the image of him and Becki out of my head. Am I jealous over a kiss on the cheek? No, of course I'm not. I'm the one who just made him lose his mind and come. I'm the one he just let tie him up, putting his trust completely in me. I'm getting everything I want from North, in exactly the way I want it, so I'm not going to spare another second for Becki and her kiss.

"So, what did Becki say to you?" I ask.

There's silence, and for a moment I hope he didn't hear my question over the sound of the running water.

But eventually he replies. "I thought you didn't care?"

"I don't. You don't have to tell me. I'm just making conversation."

He looks at me, smirking. "Since when are you uncomfortable with awkward silences?"

I bristle. "Whatever."

He tips his head, sending a curtain of water down my front. "She was just saying well done. You know, for the game," he says, but I can

tell that he's holding something back.

"And?" I say, trying to sound nonchalant.

He looks at me quickly and then away. "I think she asked me out on a date?"

I busy myself scrubbing the soap from his back, feeling the tense muscles under my hands. This is fine. This is what I wanted.

"You think?" I say.

He shrugs, sending more water droplets out, soaking my shirt. "Well, I didn't exactly catch everything she said. I was a bit distracted."

Yeah I bet, distracted by her kissing him and pressing her tits against him. I clear my throat before I speak again, leaving the shower to grab a towel and lean against the tiles.

"What did you say?"

After a long pause he shrugs. "I said maybe. I kinda panicked and I didn't know what else to tell her." He glances over at me from the corner of his eye, reading me, looking for any reaction. I'm careful to make sure my face is blank. "I'm not going to go though," he finishes.

"You should," I say.

He pauses in the process of wrapping the towel around his waist. "Really?"

He seems surprised, but why would he be? We've already been over this. Now it's my turn to shrug.

"You obviously need someone to—"

I look up as he emerges fully from the shower, and choke on my spit. The towel is slung low around his hips, and water runs down his body, dripping from his hair and chin and beading on his sun-kissed skin. The dim overhead lights pick out the lines of his toned body, long and lean. I've seen him naked countless times now, but I don't think I'll ever get over how incredibly fucking hot he is. And for some reason seeing him dripping wet, pink and warm from the shower, his eyes locked on me, it sets off some weird feeling in my gut. I want to whip the towel off him and lick the water droplets off his flat stomach. And at the same time, I want to wrap him up, throw a towel over his wet hair and tousle it dry. I swallow.

"To what?" he says.

"What?" I croak. What were we talking about? I've completely lost track of the conversation.

"I obviously need someone to do what?" he prompts.

I rub the back of my neck. I was going to jibe him about his feelings and wanting more from me than I'm willing to give, a petty knee-jerk reaction. But I don't know, it feels too fresh, too mean to be taunting him about. And it must have been hard for him to tell me. I have to admit, it was brave.

After everything I've done, all the shit I've pulled, he's still here. How many times has he forgiven me and agreed to carry on? I need to start giving him a break.

I shake my head. "It doesn't matter. It'd be good for you to go out with her."

"Oh. Ok." He seems disappointed but he gives me a half smile. "I kinda assumed you wouldn't want me to go."

"No, I told you that was fine."

"Yeah."

He dries himself off and I watch his hands work over his body. That smooth tanned skin with a dusky sprinkling of hair that marks so perfectly under my hands. My mark on his neck is bright red and speckled with burst blood vessels.

Mine.

"You really did play a great game today," I say softly.

He throws the wet towel at me. "It's all that extra training you've been giving me, Coach. Couldn't have done it without you."

An unsettling warmth spreads through my chest. "Yeah, you could have, Nolan. But I'll take the credit."

5

-NORTH-

BECKI SITS across the checked diner table at *Sal's*. She looks nice and she's clearly put effort in; her hair curled in soft brown coils, and a low-cut top hugging her ample cleavage. She looks damn great in fact, and a month ago I would have been going crazy over her. But instead, I'm sitting here thinking about someone else. And I'm very aware of the fact that she's not him.

I only came this evening because he said I should. I can't pretend that didn't hurt, but I need to face the facts. Malcolm just isn't interested in me romantically, no matter how much I want him to be, and nothing is going to change that.

Anyway, maybe this will make me feel better. Take my mind off Mal for a while. Becki is almost the complete opposite of him, so this could be exactly what I need.

I've gotten too used to spending time with Malcolm. Over the last few days since the game, we've fallen into a regular routine. I sleep at his place most nights in the spare room, he wakes me up first thing in the morning for a disgustingly healthy breakfast, and we go for a run, followed by football practice and drills. After that it's classes, then at lunch he takes me out or back to his for yet more healthy food. If I do well in class or eat right, he rewards me. Sometimes he gives me that hungry look that I know so well, and I know he isn't going to wait until we go back to his to give it to me. Those are my favorite days. Then it's a fumble in the closet, a hand job in the restroom, a blow job in the shower stalls. Gotta say I'm pretty thrilled he's added that one to his playbook. I don't know why he's suddenly started going down on me, but I am not complaining. Once classes are over for the day, we go back to his place and I study. Then he takes me into his kinky sex den and does whatever he wants to me, and I beg him for more.

This morning I assumed he wouldn't wake me up early because it's the weekend. I assumed wrong. After our run and drills, soaking with

sweat, I plucked up the courage to tell Malcolm I'd be busy this evening.

He accepted it without even a blink of an eye. He was entirely unbothered. He didn't even ask what I was doing.

I pick at the edge of the table with my thumbnail.

"North?"

I startle and look up to where Becki's looking at me expectantly on the other side of the table. I realize I haven't said anything for too long and cycle back through the last five minutes. What were we talking about? Luckily, I'm saved when a waitress comes over to the table with a pad and pen, and Becki is distracted.

"What can I get for you, honey?"

I order chicken and waffles and cheese sauce, and an extra-large salted caramel shake. It feels naughty because Malcolm wouldn't like it. If he were here he'd raise his eyebrow and tell me it was going to cost me, and I'd get that excited flutter in my chest. But he's not here, and I'm feeling rebellious. So fuck it.

Becki starts talking again and I try to concentrate on what she's saying as, absentmindedly, my hand slides up the side of my neck. The place where Malcolm marked me after the game is still tender, hidden under the high-collared shirt that Malcolm bought me from a posh boutique a few days ago. I rub my fingers over it, working the sore flesh, and remembering how it felt to have his lips enveloping me.

"What's that?" Becki says, and I snap back to the present.

"Huh?"

Becki's looking at my neck. I pull my collar up and drop my hand quickly.

"You've got a mark on your neck," she says, nodding toward it and frowning.

Shit.

"Uh . . . oh. Do I?" I say lamely.

"Yeah. Did you hurt yourself or something?"

"Er."

My mind is completely blank, and I can't think of a single thing to say that could possibly make sense. At that moment, The waitress brings my milkshake and sets it down on the table between us, and I'm grateful for the momentary distraction. She is getting the biggest tip of her life.

"So?" Becki prompts.

“Oh, it’s nothing.” I laugh nervously. “It’s just . . . I hit it on a, er . . . when I was playing football.”

That doesn’t even make sense. I curse my lack of lying abilities.

Her frown only deepens. “Oh. Did the football, like, hit you in the neck or something?”

“Er. Yeah, that’s right.” I latch on to it, silently thanking her. That sounds like as good an excuse as any.

She leans forward, trying to get another look, and I cup my hand over the side of my neck. “Ouch, that must have hurt. It looks really sore.”

“Yeah. Just my luck.” I take a gulp of my shake. I don’t know how I’d deal with other people finding out about us. It’s still relatively new to me as it is, and everyone knows my reputation: North Nolan, star football player who could get any girl he wants. The bro’s bro. I don’t know how that would change if people knew about me and Mal, and the idea is kinda scary.

She tilts her head and giggles. “It’s funny, though, ’cause it kinda looks like a hickey.”

I choke. Milkshake sprays across the table and Becki draws back in disgust. “Oh my god.”

“Oh shit! Sorry!”

I snatch a bunch of napkins from the dispenser on the table and wipe the foam dribbling down my chin.

“Are you ok?”

No, I am very far from ok. I’m the furthest from ok it’s possible to be because apparently my brain thought it’d be a cute idea to develop a crush on my repressed teammate who couldn’t recognize his own emotions if they walked up to him and kneed him in the nuts. And who turned me down when I confessed my feelings for him, even though we’re fucking like there’s no tomorrow. And he’s left a hickey on my neck the size of the empire state building, which has just been spotted by the girl I’m trying to date to get over him, resulting in me spewing a mixture of dairy and phlegm across myself and the table.

But I’m pretty sure that’s not what Becki means.

“Yeah. I’m fine.”

As I’m wiping the table, the waitress reappears again with our food and lays the trays down. And I shoot a silent prayer of thanks up to God that I don’t have to try to come up with an explanation why a football injury looks exactly like a hickey.

“Oh, this looks great. I’m starving.”

Before I land myself in any more hot water, I grab my fork and start shoveling the food in, barely leaving room to breathe. If my mouth is full, I can’t talk.

I keep stuffing my face and after a while she goes back to chatting about normal things while I nod and *hmm*, laughing at the appropriate times and making encouraging noises, and my pulse slows to a more acceptable rate. There’s no reason for her to think anything is happening between me and Mal.

When I’m stuffing my tenth forkful of cheesy waffles and chicken into my mouth, my phone goes off, and I pull it out without thinking about it. It’s a message from Mal. My heart picks up. I should just leave it unread, I’m on a date, it’d be rude, and anyway, I’m trying to move on. I should just leave it.

I open it.

Mal: You left your running shoes here.

Kinda random. I frown and type out a quick reply.

Me: ok

Becki doesn’t seem to have noticed, so I go back to eating and nodding. But two mouthfuls later it goes off again.

Ding.

Mal: In case you weren’t sure where you left them.

Me: ok thanks :)

I tuck the phone away and get back to my food. If Becki’s noticed me texting under the table she hasn’t mentioned it, and she carries on with whatever she’s talking about. I try to listen but now I’m mentally picking apart the messages.

Why would Malcolm bother texting me something so trivial? He’s never done that before. He barely texts me and when he does it’s always a blunt instruction. *“Come over here”* or *“My house. Ten minutes”* or *“Restroom, now.”* And now he’s texting me to tell me I left my track shoes where I always leave them? What does that mean?

“So I heard you’re doing really well in bio now,” Becki says, pushing the fries around her plate with her fork, and I smile and nod half-

heartedly. “What’s your secret? Maybe you could teach me.” She smiles and raises an eyebrow.

Heat spreads up my neck and I rub at Malcolm’s mark again. If only she knew.

“I just, er, learned some self-discipline—”

Ding. My phone goes off again and I whip it out a bit too quickly, dropping the conversation.

Mal: You have a test coming up, so we’re going to do a study session tomorrow.

I smile. He keeps better track of my academic schedule than I do.

Me: ok

“What’s that?” Becki asks, and I glance up at her.

“Huh? Oh, it’s nothing. Just Ma—my mom checking in.”

Becki pouts. “Did you tell her about me?”

“I—”

Ding.

Mal: What are you doing?

My thumbs fly across the screen. “I, uh. Sorry, what?”

Becki makes a frustrated noise. “Does your mom always text you this much?”

“Sorry, she likes to know the gossip,” I say, not taking my eyes off the phone. “She can get a bit cranky if I don’t reply. You know how moms are.”

Me: im doing what you told me to do

A long pause. I watch the screen.

“North?”

Ding.

Mal: Are you with her now?

Me: yes

“Hey,” Becki says.

Malcolm doesn’t reply. What the hell, he can’t just leave it at that.

“Hmm?” I hum as I fire off another message.

Me: why

Still no reply. He hasn’t even read my message. Why would he ask that and then not even bother to read my message? I sigh and take another big gulp of shake. What is going on with him?

Becki is watching me, unamused. “You done?”

“Yeah. Sorry.”

She readjusts her hair and flicks it over her shoulder, as I take another big mouthful of shake, my own petty rebellion against Mal. “So, what’s with you and that Malcolm guy?”

I choke for the second time, barely managing to hold the shake in, and cover my mouth with my hand. My mind races as I gulp it down and clear my throat, eyes watering.

“Er, what do you mean? Malcolm?” I croak and shake my head. “I don’t really have anything to do with him.”

“I dunno there’s this weird energy between you guys. Like, he’s always looking at you in bio class.”

“Is he?” I say weakly. When the hell did Becki get so observant?

She leans her elbows on the table. “Yeah. Is he like, jealous of you or something? What’s his issue?”

“I wish I knew,” I say, meaning it more than she knows.

“Well you’re ten times better at football than he is,” she says. “And he’s so *weird*. He really creeps me out.”

I frown. “Well—”

“Did you know, his dad is like super rich, and he made all his money selling illegal guns to criminals?”

“What?” North doesn’t talk about his dad at all, but I’m pretty sure that’s not true.

“Yeah, Staci told me.” She drops her voice down to a conspiratorial whisper, eyes gleaming. “And once he tried to bribe a professor into giving him a good grade, but the professor refused, so Malcolm followed him home and *stabbed* him.”

Laughter bursts out of me in a snort. “No way,” I say. “That’s not true.”

She leans back in her chair, looking offended. “Why not?” she says.

“Well, come on. Which professor? If a professor got stabbed it’d be all over the news, plus Malcolm would be in jail.”

She shrugs, disappointed that I'm not joining in with the gossip. "Not if his dad covered it up using all his illegal gun money."

I flick my hand. "Nah that's baloney. And anyway, Mal would never cheat to get a good grade, he works way too hard and he's way too self-disciplined for that. He has to do everything for himself, it's like some sort of pride thing he has. He won't even let himself eat a cheat *meal*, let alone bribe someone. There's no way he'd try to force his grades. No way."

There's a moment of silence as she studies me and then she frowns.

"I thought you said you didn't have anything to do with him?"

I freeze. Oh. Shit. I did say that didn't I. My mind races as I try to retrace my words.

"Oh. No, I meant . . . like, I don't have anything to do with him . . . like, *personally*. But I do . . . you know, like, spend time with him. sometimes. Like we're on the same team and everything so . . . like . . . I know him, but I don't *know* him. He's my teammate, so we, like, hang out and stuff . . . with other people there too. But. I just don't *know-know* him. If that makes sense . . . you know?"

She's watching me with that expression that means "what the fuck are you talking about?" and I'm cringing inside so hard my soul wants to shrivel up and crawl out of my body. Jesus, this is painful. But she doesn't say anything, just nods and puts a fry in her mouth, the first thing I've seen her eat.

While she's chewing, I take the chance to chug my milkshake. God this is going wrong in every way. This was a really terrible idea. What was I thinking? How the hell would I even be able to date someone without them finding out about Malcolm? I'm at his house every damn day. I'm an idiot. I need to wrap this up before I say anything else really stupid and out both of us. This couldn't get any worse–

I'm so busy chugging my milkshake in humiliation that I don't notice Becki sliding into the booth next to me until her shoulder nudges up against mine. I lower the glass and look at her, startled. What is she doing?

She pushes my hand down, resting the shake on the table, and then runs her hand up my chest and onto my shoulder. Her other trails down across my thigh, and I almost yelp as her fingertips brush against my clothed dick.

“You know, North, you’re kinda oblivious,” she says quietly, tilting her head into me. “But I like it.”

Then she closes her eyes and leans in.

6

-MALCOLM-

I STOP pacing, throw my book down, and glare at the wall. I'm edgy as hell, my body feels like it's full of thousands of fire ants and my head is buzzing like a fucking hornet's nest. Because North is off somewhere doing who knows what—I know what but I'm not thinking about it. This morning when he said he had plans, I knew straight away what he meant. The date with Becki. I didn't ask for details, because I don't want them. Now I'm at a complete loss as to what to do with myself.

And I have no one to blame but myself, because I fucking told him to do it. This is exactly what I wanted. I own every part of him. Well, almost every part—the parts I *want*. And all I have to do in return is not be a jerk, which is becoming easier and easier every day. He's just so easy to be around. Even the daily kisses aren't as bad as they were.

Who cares if he goes out on a boring cheesy date with perfect boring Becki and her perfect boring tits. He can date who he likes, just like I told him.

I could stay home, but it feels weirdly empty and quiet without him. And I can't concentrate on my book.

I could drive around different restaurants until I find somewhere that I want to eat. I'm in an uncharacteristically indecisive mood, so I'd have to try quite a few. Maybe peer in the windows to see what the vibe's like, if anyone inside looks interesting . . .

I dismiss it instantly. That's idiotic.

I could go run laps on the field. I haven't had to do that at all recently, not since North and I entered our agreement. Now I work out my tension in a far more enjoyable and effective way.

What has he done to me? Either way, I need to get out of this fucking empty house before I go insane, so I throw on my jacket and grab the car keys.

On the way out I spot North's running shoes where they've been tossed by the front door, the laces loose and grubby. I reach into my

pocket, pull my phone out and shoot off a quick message.

Me: You left your running shoes here.

A moment later his reply comes.

North: ok

That's it. He's obviously busy, and I should leave him to get on with it. Becki is good for him.

I hover in the hallway and scratch my jaw.

Me: In case you weren't sure where you left them.

North: ok thanks :)

I roll my eyes, fighting a smile. Why is it that when it comes to texts, Nolan seems to forget grammar even exists? Would a period hurt every now and then? A couple of commas? God, even a capital letter. I'll take anything at this point. And the smiley faces? He texts like a fucking grandma.

I open the door but then pause as another thought hits me, and send another text.

Me: You have a test coming up, so we're going to do a study session tomorrow.

North: ok

I stare at the response. Right. Ok then. That's sorted.

I have no other reason to text him. I tuck the phone away again, get in the car, and head for the library. It's open on a Saturday evening. I know because I used to go there a lot before North, it's calm and quiet and reminds me of my childhood. I smile at the memory. Me and Mom used to cycle to the local library and we'd spend hours in there. And they might have the new sci-fi book I haven't been able to get a hold of yet. Maybe that'll hold my attention.

It's only a short drive to the campus, but by the time I pull up I'm itching to check my phone again. I do, but he hasn't sent anything else. Tension gnaws at me, leaving my stomach with a horrible tight feeling. I give in and send the message before I can stop myself.

Me: What are you doing?

My fingers tap the steering wheel while I wait for the reply, eyes glued to the screen. I already know what he's doing, so I don't know why this tension is building inside me.

Finally, his reply comes:

North: im doing what you told me to do

The image of North and Becki enjoying a romantic candle lit meal materializes in my head, both of them laughing and sharing food together, and I shove the phone into my pocket, suddenly feeling far angrier than I should. What was I expecting? I knew that's where he was, even if he didn't tell me directly. After all, he always does what I say.

Me: Are you with her now? At Sal's?

Before the answer comes I shove my phone away again. Why am I asking? I don't want to know. I don't care. I really don't care. It's only fair that he gets what he needs from someone else, because he sure as hell isn't going to get it from me. Even if I wanted to, I can't. And I don't *want* to want to. So there's no point in getting frustrated over it.

I swing out of the car and slam the door closed harder than necessary, the thud ringing out in the quiet campus parking lot, but it's muffled by the fucking buzzing static in my head.

The library stands on the other side of the quad, and I make my way toward it, passing under the orange streetlamps.

I'm just stressed with everything that's going on, that's all it is. I have a lot on my plate; training North, helping him study, and keeping on top of my own work at the same time is no easy feat. No wonder I'm frayed and edgy.

"Malcolm."

I stop, a small part of me hoping it's North calling out to me. But when I turn I see Paul Shanley through the gloom, a bag over one shoulder. I glare. He's literally the last person I want to see right now. Ok, maybe Becki beats him to the number one position, but he's a close second on my shit list. I turn away as he hurries to catch up.

"Hey, Malcolm, have you thought about what I said?"

I growl. I don't have the energy to put up with his shit tonight. Was he always this irritating? I'm starting to wonder why I even started sessions with him in the first place. My daydreaming over North must have been driving me to extremes.

"Hey, wait." He grabs onto my upper arm and pulls himself along beside me, and I snatch my arm away. With everything going on in my head right now, I'm this close to punching him in his fucking face, I swear.

"It's not going to happen," I say.

"You're not even giving me a chance."

"Why would I? We're not into the same things," I snap.

"Only because you wouldn't even try it," he says. He has the fucking balls to sound exasperated. "I wasn't asking for much, you could at least have given it a try."

"If you want someone to fuck you up, go to a club. There's plenty of people who'd be more than willing to beat the shit out of you."

"I can't do that. I want you to do it." He tries to get in front of me, but I shove past him.

That was Paul's problem—he always wanted to feel special. That was why he liked me domming him, it didn't have anything to do with me, it just made him feel exclusive. And now that he's seen me and North together he can't hack that someone else has been chosen over him. He doesn't want me, he just wants to feel as special as he thinks North is inside his own head. And I can't help him with that, that's a job for a therapist.

I ignore him and keep on walking.

"Please, Malcolm," he pleads. "I know what you like, I'll let you do stuff to me that that stuck up jock never would."

Stuck up? I almost laugh. He has no idea. North's kinky streak is a mile wide. I do things with North that I would never even consider attempting with Paul, because I couldn't trust him an inch. I only did it in the first place to work out my tension. But with North? He's the perfect sub.

Paul is getting frustrated and tries to get in front of me again and raises his voice so that it carries across the dark quad. "What, now you've got the popular football guy to fuck you're too good for me? Come on! He's such a vapid, self-absorbed, dude bro."

That finally gets a reaction out of me. "You don't know him," I snarl. "And keep your fucking voice down."

“Not until you give me a good reason.”

I let out a hot breath and push past him again. But he just won’t quit.

“I don’t get why you can’t just do us both. You never had a problem with it before.”

“Because I don’t want to.”

“Why? What’s changed?”

“Nothing,” I snap.

“Then why won’t you do me too?”

I snap and turn on him. “Because I’m not interested in you, Paul! I don’t want anyone else. I only want him!”

Paul shrinks back as my words bounce off the far buildings and I snap my mouth shut, but it’s too late. I’ve said it out loud and now I can’t take it back. I swallow around the lump in my throat.

I don’t want it to be true, but it is.

I don’t want anyone else but him. All this time I thought as long as I had him that would be enough. But it’s not, I don’t just want him, I want *only* him, and there’s a big fucking difference. Everyone and everything else pales in comparison to North.

Paul is staring at me, his mouth open.

I run.

“Hey,” Paul shouts after me. “Where are you going?”

When I’m back in the car I check my phone.

North: yes

North: why

Enough of this bullshit. I start the car.

7

-NORTH-

I'M FROZEN on the spot, eyes wide as Becki leans in. What do I do? Do I let her kiss me? I don't think I want her to kiss me, it feels wrong, but I can't push her away can I? What would I say?

She lets out a sigh as her lips meet mine, and I'm staring cross eyed at her face barely an inch away.

But our lips barely brush when she turns away suddenly and looks back over her shoulder, something drawing her attention. I look up, following her gaze, to see all six-foot-five of Malcolm glaring down at us like a demon summoned straight from hell.

I jerk back. My arm shoots out, the glass next to me goes flying, and the gloopy remnants of the caramel shake splatter across the table, up my chest, and across my face.

For a split second Malcolm's glare cracks and he looks like he's going to laugh, but then his face hardens again. His dark eyes are wild, he looks manic.

Gloop drips off my chin and stains my already ruined top, and I just sit there staring at him with my mouth open like a damn idiot, my face heating to the temperature of the sun.

"Malcolm," I say.

"North, I need to talk to you," Malcolm says, his voice pitched low and dangerous.

The heat intensifies and moves downward as the rumble of his voice grounds straight into my cock.

I open my mouth, but Becki interrupts me, her voice almost as dangerous as his. "We're kind of in the middle of something here."

A muscle in Malcolm's jaw jumps, but he doesn't look at her, keeping his molten eyes pinned on me. "North. Now."

I shudder as my body reacts to his tone, all of my blood heading south. Without waiting for a response, he turns and walks away, heading for the door that leads to the restroom.

Becki turns on me. "What the hell is he doing here?"

“I don’t know,” I say, pushing myself to my feet.

“Hey where are you going?”

“I have to go. I’ll be right back,” I say, getting up to go after him as his wide back retreats. I squeeze out of the booth past her.

“What? North!”

“Sorry,” I say.

I follow Malcolm. How can I not?

8

-MALCOLM-

A WARM glow fills me as North follows. Deep down I feared he might have come to his senses and decided to go for someone easier, more straightforward, safer, boring. That I might have been too late. But he still does as I say without question.

My heart thrums as I lead the way through the diner, out the back to the restroom. There, I pause and let him catch up, holding the door open, and he shoots me a look.

“What are you doing?” he asks.

I motion him inside with my head and he rolls his eyes and goes in, dripping milkshake behind him. I enter after him and he turns on me.

“What are you doing here? Are you ok?”

He’s got milkshake all over him, his face is red, blond hair ruffled, ruined clothes clinging to his body where they’re soaked, and his expression is somewhere between exasperated, confused, and worried. And in the dim restroom lights, he looks too fucking perfect to be real.

“I changed my mind,” I say.

He blinks at me. “What?”

“You can’t date Becki.”

“What? Why?”

I want to lick the crease between his eyebrows as he stares at me, incredulous.

“Because I changed my mind,” I repeat.

He throws his hands out. “You’re the one who told me to do it. I wasn’t going to come but you said I should.”

“And now I’ve changed my mind. You can’t date her.” I lick my lips. Why is my heart pounding so hard? “You can’t date anyone.”

He opens and closes his mouth, shakes his head. I don’t blame him. If I were him, I’d probably sock me.

“Why?” he asks.

The words are lodged somewhere deep in my chest, stuck like a spiky stone. I can't say it, I can't even think about it, because every time I try an alarm goes off, panic rings in my ears, and I have the urge to run and fight. Right now, all I can concentrate on is the fact that I don't want him to be with anyone else.

"Because I said so," I grit out.

He snaps his mouth shut, the flush in his cheeks spreading. He wants to push it, but the urge to do what I say is almost as strong as my urge to command him.

God, I need him *right now*. I need him to be mine, to claim him in a way that marks him as mine and no one else's. I get up in his space, pushing him against the closed door, one arm barred across his chest. There's no resistance here, and he melts against me. The uncomfortable urge to kiss him fills me, and my control is starting to slip away. Even now it's still hard for me to give in. I've spent too long resisting it. Instead, I tangle my hand in the hair at the base of his head and pull, exposing his throat. He gasps as I tug his collar open, and lean in, finding the place I marked him earlier and running my tongue over it. His flesh is warm and soft, and his smell is so individually him; body spray, mint and lemon shower gel, and the tang of smoke from the cigarettes he thinks I don't know he smokes when he's nervous. As if I can't taste it on him every time he sneaks off for one under the bleachers.

I mouth the flesh of his neck and he rolls his hips against me. He's hard, the length of his cock presses against my hip.

He wants me. He likes me. For some inexplicable reason. And because this is North, I know he needs more than just my instructions, more than just my discipline. So I try to loosen the vise like hold and let some unchecked words slip out. Because I know he wants them. And right now, I want to give him what he wants.

"Because," I say against his throat, my voice a low rumble. "I did not like seeing you with Becki. After the game. Just now. In class. Anywhere."

He lets out a needy whine, and I don't know if it's from the friction of his dick against my hip, my mouth moving on his throat, or what I'm saying.

"You're mine, and I *never*"—I bite down for emphasis—"want to see anyone with you like that ever again."

He groans, the vibration in his throat passing through my lips. The spot under my mouth is dark red now, but it's not enough. I slide a few inches to the right and work on the unmarked flesh there.

"You-said we weren't going o-out. You're not interested in me like-like that." His words come out in gasps and jolts.

I twist my fingers in his hair and bite down harder. I know what I said, dammit. And I was a fucking idiot. I want to take them back, but these habits are ingrained in my very bones, and the words twist as they come up my throat, reforming themselves in their struggle to self-preserve. Protect.

"I know, but you're not available."

"That doesn't-make sense."

I pull off his neck. He stares up into my face, eyes heavy. He looks debauched.

"I don't care. New rule. No dating, no flirting, no kissing. I don't even want to see you holding fucking hands."

I know I sound petty and petulant and really fucking stupid, but I don't care.

"You can't just keep making up new rules," he pants.

"Why not?"

He lets out a breathy laugh, still grinding against me as I twist his hair between my fingers and press my arm across his chest.

"So you're not my boyfriend, but I'm not allowed to date anyone else."

His eyes are too hot, too intense, and they bore into me. I feel like he can see right down into my soul to the hard kernel of words that won't budge. Can't he read what I'm not saying? What I can't say? I look away.

"Yes," I say.

I know it doesn't make fucking sense and I hope like hell he doesn't push it because right now I don't think I could give him a logical reason.

"Fine. But that works both ways. You can't get with anyone else either."

I don't *want* to get with anyone else.

"Fine," I say.

"*Fine*," he repeats, and I can hear the smile in his voice, like he's making fun of me.

Guess I'm not as subtle and complex as I think I am, but right now I don't care. I just need to make sure he knows he belongs to me and

only me. I can work out my issues later.

I dip back down and latch onto his neck again until it's almost covered, sucking, licking and biting my marks across his skin. But it's not enough. I need to own all of him. While I suck, I fumble with his fly. He makes a surprised noise as I yank it open. As his pants pool around his ankles, my hand brushes something hard in his back pocket and I catch a glimpse of his EpiPen.

He has it with him. That makes all sorts of complicated things happen inside me, threatening to crack my composure, and I have to swallow them down hard.

I crouch, eyes level with the erection tenting his briefs. They're musty with his scent, and I breathe it in deeply, savoring the essence of him. Then I take the warm flesh of his inner thigh into my mouth, suck, and bite. He makes a startled groan.

I spread his legs to get better access.

"Tell me you belong to me," I say between sucks.

"I belong to you," he stutters, without hesitation.

"And no one else."

He nods his head eagerly. "MmmMmMM," he warbles, as I take a particularly sensitive part of his inner thigh just under the seam of his underwear into my mouth. I pull his top up and lick up his navel, tasting his skin and the pull of the fine hairs that mark the trail down into the top of his briefs that hide his erection. It tastes like spilled milkshake.

"Give me your hand," I say. He does, and I spit into it. "Jerk off while I mark you," I say against his stomach.

He does it without hesitation, slipping his hand into his briefs and then taking his cock out. He grabs himself hard, working the length of his dick with my spit. As he does, I trail along his skin methodically, pulling the material of his underwear aside as I go; I suck his flesh into my mouth and bite down, working it until it's stained pink and blotchy, then I move on. I work my way across his belly, over his thighs, between his legs, and then I turn him around. He leans his forehead against his arm on the door, hips angled to push his ass out as he jerks off. I snap the waistband of his underwear down under his cheeks. God, it's such a fucking great ass. Firm, sculpted, so fuckable. I suck over the curve of it while he whimpers, making small noises and grunts that only spur me on to bite down harder, claiming him as mine. *Mine*. All of him. Until his skin is raw and I've laid claim to all his most sensitive, intimate places.

He’s thrusting hard into his hand, toned body tight, working himself up to the brink.

“Say my name while you get yourself off,” I say.

“Malcolm,” he gasps.

But that’s not right. That doesn’t hit the spot. “No. The name you call me.”

He opens his eyes and looks at me, biting his lip, and then groans, “Mal.”

My chest tightens. Yes. That’s it. Only he can call me that. That’s his name. It belongs to him.

“More,” I say.

“Mal. Mal. Oh fuck, M-Mal.”

I spin him around again and work up his stomach to his chest, pushing his soaked top up around his shoulders. As he gasps my name over and over, I take his nipple into my mouth, working the soft bud between my teeth, and he cries out. I keep him there, driving him to the edge until he’s writhing and making that face that means he’s going to come. I pull off.

“Stop.”

He whines as he bucks into his fist a few more times, and then manages to drop his hand to his side with visible effort, pressing it against the door, leaving his cock standing livid and weeping.

It’s so hot I want to get right back on my knees, swallow him down and finish him off.

I smile. “Good boy.”

Wiping my hand over my mouth, I take in my work. He collapsed against the door, chest heaving and eyes heavy, bare from thighs to shoulders, his cock leaking heavily. And all over his tight body my marks glisten. My signature, claiming him as *my* territory. He’s perfect like this. If anyone gets near him now, there’ll be no denying it. No hiding it.

I lean in and lick one long stripe from thigh to nipple, and his body curves against me with a moan as I go. He tastes so good. I need more, but not here.

I tear his loose underwear off in one sharp jerk and fist it in my hand. They’re mine too. Another trophy. Then I pull his pants back up. They tent over his crotch, painfully obvious. I lay my hand over it, feeling the hard length of his cock underneath the fabric.

“Don’t touch this,” I say. “It’s mine, and I’m not finished with it yet.”

He nods, his mouth hanging open, hopelessly aroused. He looks so fucked out. My perfect golden boy.

“Let’s go,” I say. “We have a date to cancel.”

9

-NORTH-

MALCOLM GOES out before me, and I hurriedly straighten my clothes. I have no idea how loud I was and the prospect of the diner hearing me is both terrifying and arousing at the same time.

I sort myself out as best as I can and hurry out.

When I get out, Becki is facing off with Malcolm, her fists clenched.

“What did you do?”

Malcolm smothers a smirk as he says, “Nothing he didn’t want.”

My whole body flushes hot.

Her eyes narrow. “I don’t know what your issue is, Malcolm, but it’s obvious you’re jealous of him.” She sticks out a finger like she’s going to jab it into his chest. Malcolm gives her a cool stare that could stop a charging rhino, and she hesitates before she goes on, defiantly. Gotta say I’m impressed. I’d wither under that gaze. In fact, I have, several times. “Everyone knows he’s the best player, and being a jerk isn’t going to change it. Why can’t you just leave him—”

Becki notices me and her eyes widen as they run over me. I tug at my clothes self-consciously, but I can’t do anything to hide how disheveled I am. My hair is sticking up at all angles. Combined with the blush that I’m almost certain is turning my face bright red, and you’d have to be blind to think we were doing anything other than fighting, or fucking. Neither of which bode well.

“North! Are you ok?”

“Yeah, yeah I’m fine,” I say, hunching over slightly. My raging erection is huge and painfully obvious.

“What happened?”

Shit, what could I possibly say? “Nothing just . . . uh . . . football stuff.” I clear my throat awkwardly. “I have to go.”

“What? Why?”

“I just . . .” I glance at Mal for some kind of help. He looks half amused, half apologetic. But he can’t dump her for me, as much as

he'd probably enjoy it. How would that look? And besides, judging from the look on her face, she'd probably attack him.

I lick my lips, feeling like the world's hugest asshole. "You're really nice, Becki, but . . . I just don't think we're meant to be more than friends."

Becki's mouth hangs open as her face turns a shade of red and Malcolm crossed his arms, enjoying the show.

I rush on. "It's not you, you're great, I just have so much going on at the moment with school and football, I just don't have time for anything else right now. I swear it's nothing to do with you."

"What he means is, he's just not interested," Malcolm says.

I spin on him. He gives me an innocent look, like he was only trying to help. When I turn back, Becki looks like she's going to straight-up murder his ass.

"I'm really sorry, Becki, I have to go. You're great."

"Yeah, Becki, you're great," Mal says.

"Malcolm," I warn.

"North!" Becki snaps.

"North?" Another voice comes from behind us, and we all turn to see Paul Shanley pushing through the diner doors. "I cannot fucking believe this," he says, looking me up and down, his lips twisting and then turns to Malcolm. "You're screwing him in public now?"

The diner goes silent. Everyone turns to look at the four of us standing in the middle of the room and I want to shrink in on myself.

"Why are you following me?" Malcolm says to Paul.

"I just wanted a fucking burger. But I can't go anywhere now without you two rubbing it in my face!"

"Your face is the last place I want to rub anything," Malcolm hisses, aware of the eyes on us.

Paul's face darkens even more. I step forward, trying to soothe the situation before it gets out of hand, but my voice comes out a little too high and strained. "Hey, Paul? What's up?"

Paul jabs a finger at me. "You need to back the fuck off, Nolan."

Becki is staring, completely lost. Everyone in the diner is staring. And suddenly I know what a deer in headlights feels like just before it learns how to fly.

Malcolm moves. In two steps he's got his hands in Paul's top and he's hauling him back through the doors he just came in.

"Hey!" Paul shouts.

I follow close behind, feeling the eyes of everyone on my back.

Outside, the air is fresh and cold, and the lights from the diner spill out of the windows. Paul stumbles as Malcolm lets go and pushes him away, but manages not to fall down on the loose gravel. He recovers himself and comes back at Malcolm, furious. He looks like he's halfway between fighting and crying.

"What is your fucking problem?" Malcolm says.

"I'm not the one with the problem," Paul shouts back. "You're the one who dumped me over the stupid whipping thing. You're both as stuck up as each other!"

What's he talking about? What the hell is going on? "Whipping thing?" I ask.

Malcolm's eyes flash over to me, but he ignores the question. "Shut up, Paul," he says.

Paul's eyes narrow. "Why? Afraid everyone's going to find out you're fucking the football star? How about I tell the team about you guys, about all the dirty stuff you've been getting up to? He won't be so popular then."

I pale and glance back at the faces peering out through the diner windows, hoping to hell the glass is too thick for them to hear.

"I don't give a fuck who knows about us, it's not the fucking sixties anymore," Malcolm says.

Paul points at me. "You might not care, but he does."

Malcolm looks at me and sees the truth in my face. He snarls. "You know what a dumb idea it is to piss me off, Shanley. Or do you have a death wish?"

But Paul looks like he's past caring, I don't think he's even listening anymore. I start to wonder if he's had something to drink, and notice the glassy sheen to his eyes.

"You pretend not to care what anyone thinks, but I know you do. That's why you never stopped going on about him the whole time."

Malcolm clenches his fists so hard the muscles on his arms pop.

What is Paul talking about? "Who?" I ask.

Paul turns his attention to me.

"You think you're so fucking special because you can kick a ball. Just wait until he gets obsessed with the next hot guy that shows up and you'll be thrown out with yesterday's used condoms. Because that's all anyone is to him. A hole to fuck."

Paul wobbles on his feet and I hold my hands up.

“Come on, Paul, I think you should go home.”

“Shut up, you fucking dumbass,” Paul snaps at me, and Malcolm snarls like he’s this close to putting his head through the wall, drunk or not.

I step forward and put my hand on Paul’s shoulder. “Come on man, there’s no need to—”

Paul knocks my hand off and shoves me hard in the chest. I stumble back and at the same time he throws a punch that goes wide over my head. The gravel shifts under my feet and I slam against the wall of the diner with an *oof*.

Malcolm moves in a blur. One second he’s standing with his fists clenched, barely holding himself back. The next, his fist cracks into Paul’s face, with his full weight behind it. Paul’s head snaps to the side and he goes down like a sack of potatoes.

“Malcolm!” I shout.

Malcolm steps back, shaking out his hand. He looks like he wants to hit Paul again, but he manages to hold himself back. Paul groans and sits on his ass on the ground with one hand plastered to his face, his eyes dazed. Blood drips down his chin onto his pants in fat red splats.

Malcolm lunges again, and I think he’s going to punch him a second time, but instead he grabs a handful of Paul’s shirt, lifts him off the floor, and hisses into his face.

“Do. Not. Touch. Him.” He throws Paul down again. “Now get the fuck out of here, before I break your fucking jaw.”

Paul stumbles mutely to his feet and barges past him, clutching his face.

I stare at Malcolm. I’ve never liked violence but, fuck, that was so hot. He rubs his knuckles with one hand.

“Come on. Let’s get out of here.”

I nod, eyes still wide, and start to follow him before he stops short.

“No, you go to my place. I’ll meet you there. Be ready for me.” He looks pointedly at my erection, only slightly softened and still pressing against my pants. “And don’t touch that.”

“Where are you going?”

“I need to pick something up first.”

10

-MALCOLM-

I CLUTCH the steering wheel tightly as I drive back to my house. It's taken me way too long to cool off, but the sight of Paul laying his hands on North made me see red. It took everything in me not to keep on smashing my fist into his face, and I would have done it too. But North shouted my name, and suddenly I could control myself again.

It was weird. I heard him through the buzzing in my head, and then the red rage lifted before my eyes. It was like he'd thrown a bucket of cold water over me.

When I get back, the lights are on, casting a warm glow across the front lawn. My arousal has barely dipped, thinking of him ready and waiting for me. I'm excited to go in and see him. I sit in the car for a moment and watch the house. I'm so used to having him here that it's only now I realize how comfortable it feels. It's crept up on me, but now that I know it's there I don't know how to feel about it.

All I know is I could get used to this feeling far too easily, and that freaks the hell out of me. But I'll worry about it post-orgasm.

North's left the door unlocked for me, and I go in, carrying a box from the car in my arms. I need to get him a spare key so he doesn't have to keep borrowing mine.

God, I sound like an old married woman.

He's waiting for me just where he should be in the hallway, on his knees, naked, with the band of leather around his neck. He looks up at me and smiles as his face turns that shade of pink that does unspeakable things to me and makes me want to do unspeakable things to him.

His cock is standing to attention between his legs, just waiting for me to do as I please, and I have to swallow as my mouth waters. He's so perfect.

How the hell did I manage to get him? I've been such an idiot, letting my own pathetic problems and hang-ups get in the way. Well, not anymore.

The box gets discarded to one side and forgotten. I was going to give it to him first, but that shit can wait, my to do list just got rearranged, with North taking top priority.

I hook my finger into the metal loop on the leather collar and pull him to his feet. He grunts lowly at the pull on his neck, helplessly aroused.

"That's right," I murmur. "You love it don't you?"

"Yes," he says in a heated whisper.

God, I could just fuck him right here, it takes everything in me to keep control. Instead, I lead him upstairs to the spare bedroom. No, I correct myself, *his* bedroom. We've never had a session in here before, keeping it to the practice room downstairs, and he looks around, clearly confused.

"On the bed," I say.

He eyes me with a half-concealed smile and climbs on, his long legs folded beneath him.

I get him to lie down and raise his hands over his head, gripping the slats of the headboard, and tie them to the wood with leather cuffs. As I secure his far hand, I climb on top of him, my thighs straddling his bare chest, and he makes a quiet sound, hot and needy.

Once he's secure, I sit back over his hips, taking in the view of him beneath me. My marks litter his perfect skin, somehow making him look even more perfect at having been spoiled. The only thing better than perfection is being the one to ruin it.

He's flawless; his blond hair messy on the pillow, blue eyes blown wide with arousal, lips wet and parted, skin flushed. Eager and attentive, waiting for my next move.

I run my hand up his chest, over his throat, and along his jaw, just allowing myself to enjoy the feeling of him under my hand and the way his body moves in reaction. Then I flick my thumb over his nipple, and he ripples beneath me as he gasps.

"Even with all these marks I've left on you, it still doesn't feel like enough."

I lean forward, arm bolstered on the headboard, and slip my thighs up his body until my crotch is an inch from his face. I take his hair and grind his face into it. He makes a startled muffled noise that turns into needy grunts, and when I pull his head back again he's panting and red.

“Is this what I have to do to keep people away from you? Mark you with my scent too? Is this want you want? Want me rubbing my sweaty crotch on your face? You want to be suffocated by my sack?”

He whimpers and nods. I shove his face in again, longer this time, grinding hard, the friction against my cock shooting pleasure up my spine, until he’s writhing beneath me. I let go and let his head fall back onto the pillow. He looks totally fucked already, his eyes glazed over with lust.

I get my cock out and run it across his lips, smearing precum across them. He opens this mouth, hungry for me, but I draw back and he moans.

“You want my cock in your mouth?” I say.

“Yes,” he says.

“Beg for it.”

He groans and I feel his body move as his hips thrust up into the air uselessly. So needy and pliant.

“Please, please let me suck your dick.” His voice is rough and low with want. “Please, Mal.”

His words shoot straight to my cock, short circuiting every nerve on the way down, and my whole core clenches. Fuck. I feel like my brain’s been slam dunked with dopamine.

“Fuck, I love hearing you say that.” Did I say that out loud? I was aroused before, but now I’m suddenly so horny I’m dizzy, like I’m drunk or something.

He lifts his head and sticks his tongue out, reaching for me, laughing breathlessly. How can I withhold when he’s being so eager? I ease forward and press the tip of my head to his tongue. He grunts and tries to take it into his mouth, and I let it go, slowly, teasingly, until his lips close around me. The wet warmth of his mouth makes me close my eyes for a moment. I hold still for a beat, keeping myself in place to see how long I can last, teasing both of us, before I can’t go any longer and my self-restraint gives way. I push in further, building up a rhythm that grows until all too soon, I’m fucking his face, one hand tangled in his hair and holding him in place as I thrust into him.

God, it feels so good. “More?”

He whines around my cock, soft needy noises that send vibrations shooting up me. I grip hard on the headboard and roll my hips until I’m hitting the back of his throat. His eyes water and leak down his cheeks

as he gags around me, the muscles of this throat convulsing around my head in blissful waves.

I watch my cock pumping in and out of his stretched lips, his eyes rolling back in his head.

"God, you love it when I fuck your throat until you cry, don't you?"

He moans, spit slipping out between his lips. I can feel his hips bucking beneath me as he tries to get some friction on his leaking dick.

"Fuck, Nolan, you look so good choking on my cock."

The pleasure pools in my belly. I'm so close already. The thought of coming inside his throat, of him swallowing my load down, is so tempting, but I want to mark him where I can see it. I screw my eyes shut, and pull out at the last moment with a wet pop. He gulps in a wet ragged breath as I take my slick cock in my hand, my fingers still tangled in his hair and holding him in place. I work my cock furiously over him.

"Beg me to come in your face," I hiss.

His mouth falls open, his chest heaving to catch his breath. "Please," he gasps. "Please, Mal, I want it. I want to taste it. I want to be dripping with your cum."

And fuck he looks like he actually wants it, like he needs it, pretty boy North Nolan needs me to blow my load over his face.

"Fuck!"

His words tip me over the edge and before my brain can catch up I'm coming hard. My body goes rigid. I fall forward, catching myself on the headboard, and I'm shooting white ropes of cum across his face. He opens his mouth like he's trying to catch snowflakes on his tongue, savoring the taste of my seed. I can't take my eyes off the sight of him as pleasure ripples through me, wave after wave.

"Thank you," he breathes, and Jesus fucking Christ, I almost pass out as yet more cum shoots out of me and hits him across the cheeks. This guy is going to be the end of me.

I pump my cock in my fist until I've spilled my full load across his beautiful face, then I flop over to the side. He's dripping, cum sliding across his cheeks and jaw and over the bridge of his nose. I want to lick him clean.

I stare at him. What the fuck? He can dirty talk like a champ. Why have I been making him keep quiet during sex when I could have been listening to *that?* The way he begged, voice wrecked and needy, face

helpless and pleading. And he *thanked* me. Shit. I could come just listening to it.

"So was that a punishment, or a reward?" he croaks.

I blow a breath and roll over so I'm lying next to him. My limbs are jelly.

"I don't know," I say. "You decide."

He laughs. It's raspy from the savage throat fuck, and so fucking good. I don't have a favorite noise but if I did, this might be it.

God, can you hear yourself? I clear my throat uncomfortably. This is getting a bit too sentimental. But I'll blame it on the post-orgasm glow.

I look down to where his cock is still standing rigid between his legs. I still have work to do.

"But maybe save your judgment. I haven't finished yet."

I tuck my dick away and roll off the bed, coming back with two more leather straps. His eyes fix on them, and I smirk.

"You really thought you'd get off that easy? I've only just started."

11

-NORTH-

SOMETHING IS different about Mal, but I don't get any time to think about it because I've barely caught my breath, and now he's standing over me with more straps in his hand. And he's got that hungry look on his face that means I'm in for something that's going to blow my mind. I gulp.

Malcolm fixes the leather around my thighs, one on each leg, just above the knee. They're snug, enough for me to clench my muscles against the pressure of them and feel how they constrain me.

The bands have long ties attached, and Malcolm hoists my legs apart and ties them to the headboard, as wide as they'll go, dragging my legs up and spreading them, exposing my cock and ass. Now I'm bound in place and exposed, completely at his mercy. I can barely do more than wriggle helplessly. No matter how hard I pull, the straps are wide and firm, holding me in place.

I never knew feeling trapped and powerless could feel so good.

He watches me for a moment, enjoying the show. Then he traces the base of the butt plug, sending tingles through me. I twitch, and my sensitive ring of muscle clenches around it.

He grips the base, twists it a few times, and then eases it out, slowly. I stretch around it, feeling the tug against my rim. When it's halfway out and my hole is stretched over its widest part, he pauses, holding me at full stretch. It's both agony and bliss. Then he pushes it back in, and my legs jerk against the straps.

"Ngh."

He eases it out again, this time taking it all the way out, and I feel horribly empty with nothing inside me. A whine of frustration escapes before I can bite it back, but only receiving pleasure when he decides to give it to me is part of the pleasure that makes my head spin.

He puts the plug to one side and spanks my ass with his palm.

"Ah!"

The oversensitive skin across my cheeks stings and the pain feels so good. My hips jerk once up into the empty air.

Malcolm backs off then, leaving me bound and helpless, and I squeeze my eyes shut. I'm painfully hard but I have to wait for what he'll give me, he's in charge of my body, and I need him to use me however he wants. Even if that means depriving me.

"I'm going to show you just how much I own you," he says in a low voice from the other side of the room. I can hear him moving things and my heart, already racing, somehow speeds even more. God it's going to be so embarrassing if I die from a heart attack right now. "I own your pleasure, and I can withhold it or give it to you however I want."

He moves closer but I keep my eyes shut, denying myself even a hint of what's to come, drawing the sweet tension out. Now he's next to me again and when he speaks it's directly into my ear, making every hair on my body stand on end.

"I'm going to make you come over, and over, and over. Everything you have belongs to me, and I'm going to milk you dry until I've got every last drop of your cum."

His words make me gasp. I'm already shaking at just the thought of being wrung dry at his hands. More cold lube trickles down my ass crack and I hiss and twitch, jolting against the leather that holds me in place, open and exposed, completely on display for him.

"And this time, you're going to talk. I'm going to make you beg and cry and tell me every filthy thing you've ever thought."

My eyes snap open. He's standing over me, watching my reaction like a starving predator. He wants me to talk this time? He always makes me stay quiet. I search his face, but all I find is hunger and a laser focus that makes my face heat even more.

Some very dirty things go through my head. Things I would never dare say out loud. But being forced to do it—being completely exposed, not just my body but the dirty thoughts I keep secret, too, being so completely under Mal's control that no part of me is hidden—it's like a whole new level of arousal opens up. I didn't know it was possible to be this turned on. My cock aches, my body throbs, and my head spins.

His eyes grow dark at my reaction, drinking it in. Then he picks up the lube and squirts it over something in his hands that I can't see. When he's done he holds it up and my eyes go wide. It must be a new toy because I've never seen it before. Or he's been holding it back; a huge black dildo, curved and ridged with nodules down its length. He

positions it between my spread legs, above my ass, so I can see exactly where it's going. Into my asshole. My mouth falls open. There's no way in hell it's going to fit inside me. A bead of sweat trails down the side of my neck as I try to wriggle away from it.

"Talk," Mal says. "Tell me exactly what you're thinking."

I speak, my voice hoarse. "It's not going to fit. It's too big. I-I can't do it . . . But. . ." I gulp. "I want it inside me. I want you to impale me, split me open. Fucking destroy me."

I can't believe I'm saying this shit, it's like he's cast some kind of truth spell on me. My whole body flushes hot with shame, even as my hole clenches and my cock twitches at the words forced out of me.

"What else?" he says. His voice is so low it's nothing more than a growl.

The words keep pouring out of my mouth. "I want you to fill me so full with it that I can't think, I can't even breathe. I don't want to be able to fucking move tomorrow. I want you to fuck me until I scream."

Jesus Christ, did I just say that? He lets out a hot shuddering breath.

"Keep going," he says, and lines it up between my cheeks. The massive head presses against my hole, and even though the tip is tapered to a curved end, it still feels impossibly big.

"Fuck. It won't-I can't take it. I can't-I, I want to take it for you but, shit, it's too big, I can't."

"Yes you can," he says. "Safeword."

"Baseball," I say automatically.

"Safe signal."

I snap my trembling fingers.

"OK. Ready?"

I look up at him and he's staring back into my eyes with that confidence that makes me believe he can do anything. Anything is possible.

I can't do it.

But he says I can, and god knows he's been right every time. If he thinks I can . . . maybe I can. And I want to do it for him, I want to be good for him. And fuck, my body's aching for him to destroy me like never before.

I grit my teeth and nod.

He pushes, and my hole opens up around the head. It's so solid, an inevitable force that can't be stopped. And somehow, the head

squeezes inside.

I let out a moan as the burn spreads across my ass. He eases it in further, a fraction at a time, allowing me to adjust slowly, slowly. He holds it in place, eases it in and out a few times, pushes further, holds. And each time I feel like I'm as full as it's possible to be, and each time he patiently waits and then fills me more.

As he slowly stuffs me to bursting, I babble, unaware of what I'm even saying. I don't want to think about the embarrassing dirty words flowing out of me, and what I need him to do to me with the monster dildo. Each nodule that slides inside sends a jolt up my spine and makes me cry out even more.

"God," Mal murmurs. "You're taking it so fucking well. Just eating it up with that greedy ass like I knew you would."

Tears leak down my cheeks and I'm so fucked out of my head I don't know if I'm crying at his praise or if it's just the strain my body is under. Pressure builds at the bottom of my spine, and I feel like I'm going to burst, while the words just keep on pouring out of my mouth, slurred and needy and ragged.

"Oh god, oh god. Please. I'll take it. Keep-keep going, please, *ngh* oh please. I can't do it, I'm-I'm too full. Fuck, Mal, ruin me. Please."

Finally—when I'm shaking and covered in sweat, fuller than I've ever been in my entire life, fuller than I thought it was possible to be—he stops. Malcolm lets go of it and presses a hand to my belly.

"It's all in, you took it all," he says. "I knew you could, you're so fucking good for me."

My head swims as his words register. It's in; the whole dildo is inside me. I did it. I shudder, my body wound tight as a spring. My cheeks are damp with my tears, they're on my lips and I taste the salty tang of them. A sob shakes my body.

"It's so much."

He eases it out, and slides it back in, the lumps tugging against my rim. That curved tip slides against my sweet spot and I jolt, snapping at the straps holding me taught.

"Fuck!" My cry bounces off the walls.

He does it again, sliding it back and forth across my prostate, until my hips are bucking frantically and I'm making ungodly noises, stuttering and begging while he eviscerates me.

"Oh fuck. That's it. Oh. More. Oh, fuck me. More. Please."

My eyes roll back in my head and suddenly I'm coming in great heaving rolls of pleasure. He catches my spasming dick and holds it so my hot come shoots up over my stomach and chest.

He keeps on sliding the dildo in and out, over and over, and I roll with each wave of pleasure, crying, shaking apart on it, until it subsides and I come down, and he's still fucking it into me.

He keeps going against my now sensitive prostate, and works my cock in the other hand, slick with my own spill.

I whine.

"We've only just started," he says.

My cock only has a moment to soften before it starts to fill again in his hand. The dildo kneads my prostate and he slowly, steadily, mercilessly pushes me to the edge again.

He speeds up, the pleasure gathers in my belly, hot and molten as lava, and my hips thrust in time, pushing my cock up into his hand.

With a strangled shout, I come in a rush, and he aims it at my chest again, mixing with the load already spread across me until it slides and drips onto the bed beneath.

And he keeps on going. I whine, trying to escape the dildo pounding into my prostate, the hand bunching around my cock, but there's no escape, I can't move, I'm strapped in place, and all I can do is cry and writhe and take the fucking he's giving me. This time it takes longer for me to get hard, but with the constant stimulation the discomfort tips back into pleasure again, and my dick begrudgingly stiffens. My body burns with overstimulation, and he still keeps on going, his dark eyes burning into me.

"I told you, Nolan, I'm not stopping until I have every fucking part of you, every last drop of cum. And there's still plenty left in you."

I'm babbling incoherently now, twisting my body as much as I can, trying to get away, trying to push down onto it. Then the excruciating pleasure builds again, my body rolls, and he forces another orgasm out of me. My cum is limp this time, oozing out in a pathetic stream. And I sag in my bonds. That must be it, I can't have any more left in me.

I collapse back on the bed, my body uncoiling as the last orgasm burns through me. I expect him to stop, for his hands to still, and release me.

But he doesn't. I open my eyes again and look at him between my spread legs. He holds my eyes as he keeps on going.

"You've got one more left in you," he says.

“Please. I can’t . . . please. Fuck,” I say, ragged and wet as tears stream down my face.

“If you want to stop, say the safeword.”

I shake my head, squeezing my eyes shut. No, I’m not tapping out.

He keeps on plowing into me and my cock slowly, agonizingly, stiffens again. As he’s sliding the dildo in and out he lets go of my cock and fiddles with the base of the toy. The next moment I’m crying out as it vibrates against my prostate, shooting electricity through me, singeing every nerve ending. He goes back to pumping my aching dick, and the head of the dildo slides across my prostate, milking me. My muscles clench, my limbs shudder, and my last load of cum oozes out and dribbles across his fingers as I shake and moan.

He releases my cock and leans forward between my legs. He runs his tongue up the length of my torso, lapping at the cum drenching me.

“I want to kiss you. Please,” I say in a shuddering whisper.

He doesn’t even hesitate. He leans down and presses his lips against mine, and as my body rolls and twitches, I push my tongue between his lips, tasting the salty tang there, and sigh.

12

-MALCOLM-

I LIE on the bed listening to the hum of the shower in the en suite. After I carefully untied him, I carried him to the shower and washed his perfect body with warm water as he lay there and let me, eyes glazed and a blissed-out smile on his face.

I stayed silent while the warm water washed away the cum. It felt painfully intimate, and I'm still dazed. After he was clean I gave him some space to soak on his own, and he didn't seem to mind as I slipped away.

My fingers brush my lips. They're still swollen from the long messy kiss I gave him. I'm feeling strange. Like the ground has lost its stability.

He looked so good, ruined and debauched, so needy and . . . open. Like he was showing me his soul through his blue eyes. I couldn't not kiss him. And I don't know if I'm scared or not.

The box I fetched from the car rests on the foot of the bed, and a healthy dinner and drink is laid out on the side table with some of his new clothes; a soft T-shirt and comfy sweatpants. After that session, he'll need time to recover. I lie and wait for him, staring up at the ceiling, feeling oddly empty. But not in a bad way. More like a calm lake. It's kinda nice.

The water shuts off and he emerges in a cloud of steam wrapped in one of the towel robes, skin clean and pink. He stops and frowns, seeing me on the bed, like he's surprised I'm still here in his room.

"Hey," he says.

Water drips from his hair and down his jaw. I watch it for a moment, and then point at the box.

"I got those for you."

He turns his frown from me to the box. "Like a present?"

I roll my eyes. "No, like a 'don't be a fucking idiot again' reminder."

He snorts. "What is it?"

He opens the box and looks inside. His mouth opens but he doesn't say anything, just stares and blinks for a while, then looks up to me.

“Are these . . .”

“Don’t worry, I checked. They’re the ones you use.”

He pulls out a pack of EpiPens.

“How much were all these?”

I shrug. “Don’t know, didn’t check.”

His eyes go round and shiny. I shift uncomfortably as he stares at me, his big blue puppy dog eyes going soft. Oh shit, he isn’t going to cry is he? Please don’t cry.

“This is . . .” He blinks a few more times and I cringe inwardly at the emotion in his voice. “Thank you, Mal. This means so much to me.”

“It’s nothing.”

“It’s not nothing.” He shakes his head and makes a noise somewhere between a wet laugh and a scoff. “You have no idea.” He rummages through the box still shaking his head. “You know these are probably going to expire before I use them? They only last about a year.”

I shrug again. “Then I’ll buy you new ones.”

He pulls his bottom lip in between his teeth and sits down on the bed next to me. Ok, this is getting a little too emotional for me. The warning voice that’s always at the back of my head is starting to panic, telling me it’s time to go. And I want to. I want to get out of here, back into my own room where it’s safe and empty and there’s no North looking at me the way he’s looking at me.

But . . . I also don’t want to.

It’s a fucking weird feeling, and I have no idea what’s going on inside my own head. So I just keep very still and wait to see what’ll happen.

After a long silence he says, “So. You and Paul?”

Right. I clear my throat. “We used to fuck, that’s all it was. I ended it a few months ago.”

“What was he talking about? Outside the diner?”

I groan internally. I’ve had enough of Paul for a lifetime. “It was nothing,” I say.

“He said something about . . . whipping?”

“Yes. He did. But it doesn’t matter.”

“I’d still like to know,” he says.

I avert my eyes, but I can feel his gaze burning into the side of my face. “He wanted me to whip him as part of our practice, but I don’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“It makes me uncomfortable,” I say. It makes me more than uncomfortable, but he doesn’t need to know that particular one of my many weaknesses.

“Oh, ok.” Out of the corner of my eye I can see him frowning.

“Are you disappointed?” I ask. It’s not something he’s ever shown interest in, but maybe he is.

“No.”

There’s a long pause, and I risk looking back at him again. I can see the thoughts whirring in his head. What’s going to come out next? I dread his next question, but we need to get this over with, and I haven’t died yet so—

“Is it something to do with your scar?”

My eyes snap up to his and I take a sharp breath. Damn. It’s easy to forget how sharp he is. I don’t know if I can talk about this. My throat already feels like it’s getting too tight. Should I lie?

But seeing the way Becki was with him was a wake-up call. While I’m busy keeping a separation between us, other people won’t be so eager to stay away from him. I thought I could deal with not being exclusive, but I was wrong. North is mine, and I don’t want anyone touching him, or even looking at him. The compulsion to own all of him is more than just a desire. It’s a driving force that I have no control over. His thoughts, his body, and each and every one of his desires—I need them all. And this barrier I keep between us keeps me safe. But he wants more, and how long is he going to settle for what I can give him before he gets sick of trying?

The barrier might be protecting me, but it’s holding me back. To keep him I might have to step outside my comfort zone, way out. I rub my palms on the legs of my pants. The thought of making myself vulnerable makes me feel sick.

But I have to decide which I want more, safety? Or North?

Everything inside me is rebelling, but I already know the answer before I’ve even finished asking the question, and it fills me with panic and excitement at the same time.

North.

I want North more.

I clear my throat. “Yes. It is,” I say.

His eyes widen, shocked that I actually answered his question. I busy myself scratching my jaw while he stares at me, heat burning

across my skin, up my neck, over my face.

"He didn't . . . Paul didn't give it to you did he?" he says. He actually sounds worried. It's . . . sweet. I rub my hand over my neck, deeply uncomfortable.

"No. I've had the scar for a long time."

"Can you tell me about it?" he asks quietly.

Can I? I honestly don't know.

"Not yet."

"Ok." He nods.

And somehow that makes my throat even tighter. He's not going to push, he's happy with the answers I can give him. I flex my shoulders and try to swallow around the lump in my throat. If I cry now I'm going to throw myself in front of a bus.

My stomach is churning, and I feel too open. A snail without its shell. Giving him even that small truth was like pulling teeth.

Slowly, like he's afraid I'm going to spook and run off—and honestly, I might—he lifts his hand and rests it on my shoulder. I roll my neck, fighting the urge to pull away.

"Can you stay here tonight?" he asks. "With me?"

I take a deep breath. "Ok."

The smile that spreads across his face is almost blinding.

"Thanks."

"But no cuddling or whatever," I say quickly. Damage control.

His face is so fucking smug I want to hit him and kiss him at the same time. "Sure. Let's not go crazy."

Smug little shit.

13

-NORTH-

ONCE HE'S satisfied that I've eaten and drunk enough, I climb into the bed. My body aches satisfyingly as I crawl under the sheet, fighting to keep my eyes open. That was hands down the hottest sex we've had so far, and to make it even better, he's staying the night with me. I feel almost giddy.

He strips off his clothes carefully until he's in just his top and boxers. I don't miss how he keeps his back away from me as he does, hiding his scar in case his top rides up. But that's ok, I want him to be comfortable, and I'm more than happy with the progress we've made today. His struggle was painfully clear as he told me about Paul and the scar, and I don't want to spook him. One step at a time.

After a brief hesitation he climbs onto the bed next to me, carefully, not looking me in the eye. He's meek, and it's really damn weird. For the first time since I've known him he seems unsure of himself, almost shy. It makes me want to stretch my arms around his wide shoulders and squeeze, and tell him that it's ok, it's just me. But that would probably be a bad idea.

He doesn't get under the covers either, just lies down stiffly on top, like a body in a casket. It occurs to me that I've never actually seen him sleeping before. Maybe he sleeps like a vampire every night.

"Goodnight, Mal," I say.

He grunts in response, his eyes already closed.

He can deny it all he wants, but I know I mean more to him than he'll admit. He tries to be cold and distant on the outside, but I know him now, and he can't hide his true feelings from me. Even if he can hide them from himself.

Whatever this barrier is that he holds up around himself, I'm going to break through it. I'm going to break *into* him, and make him mine, until he can't hide from me anymore.

A smile spreads across my face. And I'm totally going to spoon him when he's asleep.

KISSED BY MY TEAMMATE

1

-Malcolm-

I WAKE slowly, begrudgingly, to a heavy weight across my body. Something is pressing down on my chest and the top of my thighs. I shift and try to roll away, but whatever it is is wrapped around me, pinning me in place.

It takes a moment for my brain to wake up enough to realize that this isn't normal, and I raise my head off the pillow, blinking my eyes open.

There's a long, tanned arm thrown across my chest. I freeze.

North is twined around me, his face pressed into the side of my neck, snoring like a hog. His soft blond hair tickles the side of my jaw, and he's clinging on with one arm wrapped around my chest and one leg thrown across my thighs.

A tidal wave of emotions crashes through me; fear, shock, confusion, and a crushing yearning, all muddied together and impossible to decipher.

I agreed to stay with him last night after I pushed his body to the limit. He took everything I gave him and still wanted more. He wanted me too. And now here I am, lying in the spare bed with him *cuddling* me. There's no other word for it. I've never woken up in someone's arms before. This is entirely unexplored territory for me, and the knee-jerk urge to shove him away is strong, but after everything that happened yesterday, after the progress we've made, I don't want to risk hurting his feelings. As I took him apart and claimed him as my own, piece by piece, I swore to myself that I was never going to hurt him again.

I could try to wriggle away without waking him up. But then what if he *does* wake up? What would I say to him? How would he expect me to act? How are you meant to behave when you wake up with someone clinging to you like an abandoned baby monkey?

Without moving my head, I glance at the clock on the nightstand. It's already 7 a.m., an hour after I usually get up and wake him for our morning run. I can't remember the last time I slept this long. How much of that has to do with the tiring events of last night, and how much has to do with sleeping next to North, with his body pressed against mine?

I shift slightly. If I wake him up he'll probably get off me. And . . . I'm not sure if I want him to. If I look past the blaring alarm in my head and the voice telling me to flee, I'm actually pretty comfortable. His body feels nice against mine, toned and yet soft. A reassuring weight. This moment right here, I can deal with this. I can just be in it for a while. The problem is when we're both awake.

I lie as still as possible, entirely frozen and barely breathing, and stare up at the ceiling as his warmth seeps into my muscles and bones, down into my core. Hours pass, the sun crawls across the wall and North still snores away into my neck. God, I need to pee. Is this how long he'd sleep in without me waking him up? It feels like most of the day has already gone.

My bladder is about to explode when he groans. I panic and snap my eyes closed, pretending to be asleep. I'm such a fucking coward. his body moves sluggishly against me as he wakes, and then stops. Has he just noticed the way he's holding me? Did he mean to throw himself over me, or was it an accident? I find myself hoping it's the former.

Then his arms slowly, carefully, extricate themselves from me, his leg slides off, and he rolls away, leaving me cold. He doesn't want to wake me. Does that mean he's as freaked out as I am? Or is he just worried I'll be mad?

And what do I do now? Just lie here pretending to be asleep indefinitely? Maybe if I pretend to be asleep for long enough, he'll just get up and leave, and I won't have to face him, or what this relationship is becoming, in the cold harsh light of day.

I already said I was a coward, ok? I pretend not to be afraid of anything, but that's a lie. I'm just afraid of the things most people crave. Affection. Emotion. Connection. And the way they make me vulnerable.

There's a rustle of fabric and the bed shifts as North climbs off. Then the soft pad of his feet recedes until they're gone.

I crack my eyes open. The room's empty, the bedsheets messy next to me where he was. He's gone. I stare at the ceiling and take a

long, deep breath. I preferred it when he was here, so why can't I face him? Why can't I face *us*?

There's the pad of feet on the stairs, a soft clinking noise, and I don't have enough time to decide whether to pretend to be asleep again or not before he walks through the open door carrying two steaming mugs. He pauses in the threshold, seeing me awake, and I sit up. Might as well face it, I can't pretend to be asleep all day. He's wearing the large T-shirt and comfy sweatpants he wore to bed last night. With his hair still sleep-ruffled and messy, he smiles at me, his eyes crinkling in the corners, and comes over to the bed.

"Hey, sorry if I woke you up." He lifts one of the mugs. "I brought coffee."

He hands it off to me and I take it, wrapping my hands around it and feeling incredibly awkward, and he settles back on the bed by my side, throwing his long legs wide over the sheets in a display of obscene comfort.

"Did you sleep ok?" he asks, scratching one hand through his mess of hair. I want to put my hands in those blond strands too, but I keep them wrapped around the mug. I don't think I've ever felt so uncomfortable in my life.

"Yeah," I grunt.

There's a moment of silence. *This* is the bit I hate, this skin crawling feeling, this expectation of . . . something. Something I don't know. And the creepy feeling of failure that I can't get it right.

"Is this weird for you?" he asks.

I let out a breath I didn't realize I was holding. "Kinda," I say.

He takes an obnoxious slurp of his coffee. "You look like you're trying not to freak out."

I narrow my eyes at him, and he laughs, impish. "And you think pointing it out will make it less weird?"

"I dunno," he says.

But it's worked. I feel less stiff. I gulp the coffee and sit back against the pillows, enjoying the burn of it down my throat and the warm, smokey smell. North's unreasonable level of charisma is hard to repress and impossible to avoid. I swear, the more time I spend with him the less immune I become. God damn cheerful asshole, making me feel relaxed when I should be agitated.

He nudges my leg with his foot. "It's ok, I'm not going to start calling you my boyfriend or anything. Or expecting you to be any less grumpy."

I grunt into my mug. “Good, because I’m not going to be.”

“Good,” he says.

“Good.”

He’s grinning far too cheerfully. “Good.”

He raises his eyebrows at me and swirls his mug. “Because I like my guys like I like my coffee, dark, bitter, and—no wait, that doesn’t work. I like my coffee sweet as hell.”

I roll my eyes. I swear he has more sugar in his coffee than coffee.

“Guess you’re shit out of luck then. I don’t do sweet.”

North pulls a shocked face. “What? No! You mean you’ve been lying to me this whole time?”

“You’re such an idiot,” I say, and his grin only widens.

2

-North-

One week later

On Wednesday morning I wake up tied to the bed.

Well. This is new.

My wrists are roped to the headboard, and my ankles are tied to the bedposts, as wide as the bed will allow, so I'm spread-eagled on the mattress. I'm completely naked—Mal likes it when I sleep in the nude—except for the metal cage on my cock, and the plug up my ass. The ropes cut into my flesh, and I pull against them, relishing how they hold me firmly in place, leaving me completely helpless.

A polite cough at the foot of the bed makes me lift my head.

Malcolm stands between my feet, with that smug "cat got the cream" look he does so well. Over the past week, he's grown more and more comfortable with sharing my space at night. As far as I'm concerned, we're a couple in every way that matters, except by name. He's made it clear I'm not his "boyfriend." We just spend all of our time together, sleep in the same bed, fuck like rabbits, and absolutely obsess over each other. We don't need a label for this, other than "fucking great."

"You're awake," he says.

"Good morning to you too, babe," I say.

Malcolm lifts the butt plug remote and clicks a button. The plug inside my ass vibrates on the highest setting, sending a jolt through me. I jerk and gasp out a swear word and the vibration stops.

I blow a lock of hair out of my face. "Ok, it's a no pet names kinda morning," I say. "Got it."

We don't use pet names, unless I'm trying to get a rise out of him. So, actually, I guess we do use pet names quite a lot. Or at least I do.

He pretends they irritate him, but I know he loves the excuse to react. And I love giving him the excuse.

Malcolm leans over the end of the bed, resting one arm by my leg. “Any more smart comments from you, and I won’t let up.”

Fuck, his voice sounds so good with that taunting edge, so cool and in control. The joke’s on him though, I don’t want him to let up.

I clear my throat and try not to sound too unsteady. “OK, daddy.”

That does it. The plug jumps to life again, and this time it doesn’t stop.

Mal watches me squirming. “Got anything else to say?”

All I manage is a kind of strangled whimper as I struggle against the ropes. He keeps me like that for a few minutes, just watching as the plug thrums in me like the freaking energizer bunny, and my cock tries valiantly to fill in the cage. It’s not long before I’m flushed and aching for release.

Mal walks around the side of the bed, sliding one hand up the length of my body as he goes. “You’ve done really well recently, North—study, practice, diet. I can’t fault you on any of it. Except . . .” he trails off and tips my head up with his finger, exposing my neck and the bite marks littering my skin—his new favorite hobby. “There’s one area where you’ve really let me down.” He gestures around the room, really hamming it up. “This place is a fucking pigsty.”

I look around at the piles of clothes, dirty underwear, football gear, and books strewn across the floor and grimace. I didn’t realize how much of a mess it has become. My dorm is always a dump, but I’ve managed to stay relatively neat here, even though I can’t remember putting any extra effort in to clean up after myself, Malcolm’s house seems to magically clean itself . . .

Wait.

Has he been tidying up after me this whole time? The mortifying realization sinks in. It’s either that or he has a secret maid that he keeps locked in a closet somewhere, which, knowing Mal, I wouldn’t be entirely surprised by.

“You haven’t been picking up my dirty jocks have you?”

He crosses his arms. “Not for the last week I haven’t,” he says.

I want to bury my burning face, but I can’t. “Sorry about that,” I say, flexing my hips pathetically. This is humiliating, and it’s embarrassing how much it’s turning me on.

He tuts. “It’s disgusting. I want this room kept tidy from now on.”

“Seriously, Mal, if you don’t want me to call you daddy you’re going about it the wrong way,” I groan.

He pinches my nipple and twists, and my body arches under his hand.

“I don’t give a fuck what I sound like, when we’re done here you’re going to clean this room on your hands and knees.”

Oh, fuck yeah. Only Mal could make tidying sexy. I roll again as his hand leaves my nipple, curving my chest up toward him, desperate for more contact.

“And I found these,” he adds.

He holds up my half-empty packet of very secret cigarettes that were very cleverly hidden under my pillow. Shit.

“Oh,” I say. “I mean, what are those? I’ve never seen them before.”

He waves them loosely, unimpressed. “Did you really think you were being sneaky? North, I can smell them on you whenever you sneak off to have a smoke. And hiding them under your pillow? How old are you?” He sighs. “You quit *today*.”

“I’m sorry, Mal. I’ve been trying to stop. I swear.”

“Don’t say sorry to me, apologize to your lungs. It’s them you’re fucking up. But I can’t blame you, I know your self-discipline is nonexistent. It looks like I’ll have to keep you in line myself.”

He tucks the packet into his pocket, and his eyes darken. “So that’s two things I need to punish you for. But first,” he reaches between my spread legs and teases my sack, stroking it lightly and rolling it in his hand. I jump at the unexpected contact. “While I’ve got you all tied up, it seems a shame to waste it.”

His hand leaves my balls and he slides his fingers along the length of the cage, teasing my cock through the meager spaces between the bars. My hips jump, pushing my trapped dick into his hand, but he backs off again. Goddamn, but he must have a degree in edging.

He retreats to the end of the bed again and crouches down, only his head and shoulders visible. I lift my head, but I can’t see what he’s doing down there.

He fiddles with something, and then a buzzing fills the room. When he stands again he’s holding a vibrator wand with a bulbous head, thrumming like a nest of hornets. I gulp.

Moving slowly and keeping his eyes on my face, he brings it to my caged dick. It’s like an electric shock on my already aching cock. My

body spasms. He drags the wand up my body, circling my erect nipple, pink from being pinched, and then buzzes it lightly on the stiff bud.

With me tied in place and unable to move, he keeps going, alternating between my cock and nipples while I writhe, until I gasp out a strangled*, "Fuck!"*

Finally, he stops the torment and steps back. My body twists with burning arousal, my caged cock leaking between my legs. "Goddamn, Mal, I need to come."

He tilts his head as if he's considering it. "As much as I love to hear you beg, I want to hear your desperate muffled moans while I work on you more."

He ducks again—does he have a whole goddam stash of sex toys down there—and brings up the red ball gag. *Oh, fuck yes.*

I whimper as he pushes it into my mouth and fastens it behind my head.

"Safe signal?" he asks.

I snap my fingers and give an enthusiastic thumbs up for good measure.

"Good."

He steps back and takes me in with dark brown hungry eyes, head tilted, arms folded, the vibrator held loosely in one hand.

"If only the team could see you now. What would they think?" One side of his lips quirk up. "I could call them, get them to come over. Do you want that? Get them all in here and let them see you tied up and caged, squirming and begging for more like a slut. Maybe I'd let them take turns with you. I'd enjoy watching them stretch out your hole one by one. Make you beg and cry to come with no relief."

Even though I know he would never do that, the idea is enough to make me whimper helplessly around the gag. Because he could if he wanted to, and there wouldn't be a damn thing I could do about it. And fuck me if it doesn't make my cock twitch.

He steps forward and presses the rod to my cage again and my body goes rigid as more cum leaks out.

His eyes are blown wide with lust, and he shakes his head. "The star of the college. You're in your element on the field. But like this? *This* is what you were made for. You might be everyone's golden boy out there, but in here, where it matters, you're my toy."

It's true. It's so fucking true. This feels more real and vital than anything else in my life. I belong to Malcolm completely and wholly.

He rests the vibrator against my hip with the head on the cage and leaves it there, thrumming me into sweet agony. There's no escape and no release. Mal climbs up and takes position between my stretched legs. After a liberal dousing of lube from his apparently secret stash, he grasps the base of the plug and eases it out slowly, then slides it back. He repeats the action, stretching me with each thrumming thrust. I move my hips, pushing down on it, and he speeds up until he's fucking it in and out of me.

The noises I'm making are loud and wobbly. Noises I should be embarrassed by, and I would be if it was anyone but Mal. But only he can do this to me, only he can wreck me so thoroughly that I shrug off any kind of dignity, and I let the noises batter against the inside of the ball in my mouth.

With a final tug, he pulls the plug all the way out and I whimper at how woefully empty I am, needy and pathetic and so past caring.

He sets the plug aside and snaps the waistband of his pants down, revealing his cock, long and hard and ready to fuck. I whimper again at the sight of it. His top rides up, exposing a swathe of his hard abs, littered with dark hairs. God, he's so fucking hot. How can someone just go around being this hot and get away with it? It should be illegal.

I wish he'd take the rest of his clothes off, I want to see his tight body, that scar slashing across his shoulders, his thick thighs, the mounds of his abs, and the way his body strains when he's fucking me.

But a second later I forget all about it because he slides his knees under my thighs and grips my hips. My crack is slick with the cum that's dribbling out of me, and the head of his cock pushes up into it, smearing it around. His face is tight with concentration as he eases his cock inside me, and my legs shake as I stretch around him.

"Too much?" he checks in.

I shake my head.

"Want it hard?"

Oh god yes. I give him a jerky nod.

He draws out, then slams back in, filling me all the way in one thrust. I throw my head back and scream into the gag. My hands ball into fists, pulling tight against the rope as my cock strains painfully against its cage. He pulls out and slams in again, fucking me hard in a relentless rhythm that makes me see stars, and burning pleasure mixed with pain hammers through me again and again. He leans forward as he works and the fine golden chain around his neck falls free of his top,

dislodging the key to my cage to swing directly over my trapped cock, taunting it with its release. Tantalizingly close but still so far.

He thrusts hard and I screw my watering eyes shut.

“Look at me,” he snarls. I force them open again and our gazes meet. His is furious with hunger, searing into me until I feel it like a burn in my chest. The sheer possessiveness in his eyes takes my breath away.

Then his muscles bunch, his eyes fly wide, and he’s emptying inside me, filling me with warm cum as the cords on his neck stand out and his shoulders strain. He keeps pumping, riding his climax to the very end, and I clench around him, eager for everything he has.

Finally, he flops down on top of me, boneless and limp, with his softening dick still inside me. I rut up against him as much as I can, whining.

“You wanna come?” he rasps against my throat.

I nod desperately.

“Then earn it.”

He heaves himself up, pulls out of me, and produces a huge dildo. With a twist and a shove, he pushes it up my ass, trapping his cum inside me. Then he unties my arms and legs.

“The gag stays in. You’re going to clean this room on your hands and knees with that dildo up your fucking ass and stuffed full of my cum.” He tucks his spent cock away. “I’m going to wash up. If this room isn’t clean when I get back, I’m going to tie you up again, take that dildo out, and throat fuck you with it. And then I’m not going to touch you for the rest of the day, and you’ll be locked up with no relief. Understand?”

I nod, eager to do his bidding. I would dance naked around the flagpole in the quad right now if he wanted me to. If it meant I could get off.

“You’ve got twenty minutes.”

3

-North-

THE ROOM is tidy in ten. it's possibly the fastest I've ever moved, which is no easy feat considering I'm on all fours with a sizable dildo up my ass. Guess I just needed the right motivation. When I'm done I kneel by the bed, since sitting seems like a bad idea, and try not to touch my caged cock.

Mal returns fresh and clean, and after a quick inspection of the room, he bends me over the side of the bed and fucks me again, this time with my cage off. The ball gag barely stifles the ridiculous noises that he forces out of me as he works my cock in tandem with his thrusts. I'm already so close to the edge that it's pathetic how fast I come. He slams into me once, twice, and then I'm crying out as my body constricts and my wet heat spills between my belly and the bedsheet.

Afterward, Mal takes me to the shower. I'm expecting him to stand to the side like he usually does while he washes me down, with his sleeves rolled up and the water soaking the front of his shirt. I let the water run over my face, and when I open my eyes again Mal is peeling his clothes off. All of them. I stare, transfixed, as he reveals his body, his chest and shoulders, stomach, and abs, then slides his pants and briefs down his long legs, until he's standing completely naked in front of me. I blink water out of my eyes. What's happening? Is this real?

Despite my best efforts, it's impossible not to outright stare, mouth agape, as he steps *into the shower* next to me.

This has never happened before. Mal has never been fully naked in front of me, and fuck me, it's a sight to see. He's like a Greek god, long, lean, and built with smooth muscles.

I don't say anything, just silently step over to make room for him, even though the whole team could fit in this shower. He stands stiffly, his eyes cast down as water cascades along his body, running in

rivulets over the lines of his muscles, and beading on his eyelashes. My mouth's hanging so wide open I'm surprised I don't drown.

After a while, my brain reconnects to the rest of my body.

"Didn't you literally just have a shower?" I ask, because I can't think of a single thing to say.

"You got me dirty again," he mutters.

I can't argue with that. Not that I want to, with his fully naked body so close to me.

He starts cleaning me, lathering shower gel between his hands and gently working it into the skin of my stomach, ass, and thighs.

He ducks down to work my legs and I stare at the top of his head and try not to get a boner again so soon. This is hot, but I don't want to jinx it.

After the shower, Mal fixes us breakfast. It's grits today, but at least I don't have to suffer through that healthy sludge drink. Just thinking about it makes me gag.

He has his grits plain, like a true psychopath, but he puts out honey and a bowl of sliced fruit for me. I pile it on.

This scene, us here like this, is so close to the fantasy I have of us in my head as a fully-fledged couple, and now for the first time, I actually believe we can get there. We can make this work. We just need a little longer to allow Mal to fully inch out of his shell. Like an adorable little bad-tempered hermit crab.

"Sorry about the room being such a mess," I say around a mouthful of honey, fruits, and grits. "I don't want it to seem like I expect you to tidy up after me."

He shrugs. "I don't really mind, but I had to find something to punish you for. You've been doing so well I'm running out of reasons, and I can't have you getting too cocky." He smirks and spoons grits into his mouth.

My mouth drops open. He stopped tidying just so he'd have a reason to punish me. "You sneaky bastard."

He spoons another load into his mouth and swallows, smug. "Don't act like you didn't like it."

I snort.

He keeps telling me how well I'm doing, and I want to tell him that he's been doing great too. Ever since the night he interrupted my date and marked my body—I shiver at the memory—he's changed. It's like a switch inside him somewhere has flipped and now he isn't trying to

hide from me, not like before. And I can see how much effort it takes him sometimes.

But I know if I say that he'll go all stiff and awkward, and right now I'm enjoying the way his body drapes so lazily in his chair and over the countertop, all loose and relaxed from coming twice already.

Why is it that Mal can do all kinds of filthy things to me without blinking an eye, but say something nice to him and he shuts down?

One of the things that's different now is that when I ask him a question he actually tries to answer it. I don't push him if he's struggling, but I still take advantage of it every opportunity I get. And this morning I'm back on my bullshit.

I polish off another spoonful, dripping with so much honey it makes my teeth hurt, and wave the spoon at him.

"So, are you gay? Bi?"

He blinks, caught off guard by my sudden tangent, but recovers quickly with a grimace. His face says it all; *oh great, welcome to twenty questions with Mal again*.

"I'm gay," he says.

For some reason, the thought of him being with other guys is worse than him being with girls. I guess I want to feel special. I want to be the exception to his rule like he was for me.

"What was your last boyfriend like?" I say, trying to sound nonchalant despite the jealousy tightening my stomach.

He looks down at his bowl, stirring the grits. "I've never had a boyfriend."

"What? A total hottie like you?"

He shrugs, his top straining over his shoulders. "I don't need that kind of thing," he says. "I like to keep things easy."

I can't help snorting at that.

"Right. So is this easy?" I say, because it's been anything but. This is the most stressful, complicated relationship I've ever had with anyone.

"No. But also, yes." He clears his throat and stares into his bowl like the pale sludge in it is the most interesting thing in the room. "It's too easy being with you. I'm not used to it being like this."

Oh. My heart. Without thinking, I reach over and tip his head toward me. I lean in and stop an inch away from his face. This is our routine now. I wait for him to take the last step and come to me.

He draws a deep breath, closes his eyes, and kisses me. It's long and deep and hungry, his lips trembling like he's trying to hold himself back. To not lose himself. I feel for him, but to be honest, I fucking love it too. The fact that I can make his vise like grip waver with something so simple.

When he finishes, I murmur against his lips, "I can make it a bit harder for you if you want. You horrible asshole."

He snorts as he goes back to his breakfast, his lips are pink and swollen, and his cheeks have a red tinge. I lick my lips, satisfied with myself.

We eat in comfortable silence for a while until a thought occurs to me.

"Oh, the guys on the team are doing a social on Friday," I say.

He eyes me. "What kind?"

"I think it's a bar crawl." I know it's a bar crawl.

"Sounds horrible," he says. "But you can go if you want. Take it as a reward for good behavior."

I scrape my spoon around the edge of my bowl. "Actually, I was thinking it'd be fun for both of us to go."

"Both of us?"

"Yeah."

"Together?"

"Not like, as a *couple*." I'm still not sure how to go about coming out to everyone, and I'm definitely not into anyone finding out exactly what is going on between me and Mal. Even though I'm pretty sure not all of them are straight, the guys might look at me differently if they knew I liked being tied up and fucked into oblivion. And I'm not ready for that. I'm not like Mal, I care what people think of me. Call me vain, but I can't help it.

He gives me a long-ass look. "I don't do socials. I don't do bar crawls."

"Oh, come on, it'll be fun! And I think it'd be good for you to hang out with the guys a bit, let them see you're not that scary."

His eyes narrow, and then he fits his hand around my jaw, tilts my head up, and leans into my face.

"What makes you think I'm not scary?"

I gulp.

How many times can you fuck in one morning? Asking for a friend.

4

-Malcolm-

FOOTBALL PRACTICE this morning is like most things in my life. Hard and fast. Coach has us running drills in full gear and even though there's a cold bite to the October air, I'm sweating in rivulets by the time we have a break.

Over by the bleachers, North pulls his helmet off, twisting his hair into damp spikes. I jog over to him, tugging my own helmet off and feeling the cool air brush against my skin.

North sees me and his face lights up, even though I haven't been more than fifteen feet away from him all morning. I didn't know it was possible to like someone this much.

"Hey, you need a drink," I tell him.

I grab a bottle of water and a towel from my bag and toss them to him, and he catches them deftly, one in each hand. He pops the lid off the water and gulps it down, his throat rolling. I watch, transfixed at the way his Adam's apple bobs with each swallow, and I have to gulp too as I get lurid flashbacks of the night before.

Once the bottle is empty he throws the towel over his head and scrubs his hair and face, soaking up the sweat. When he pulls it off his dirty-blond hair is a disheveled mess that looks like he's just fallen out of bed after a hard fucking. Damn it, now I'm having flashbacks again that send my blood pulsing downward, and I've already come twice this morning. This can't be healthy.

North tosses the towel back at me and I throw it over my own head. It smells like him, and I breathe in deeply while I scrub the sweat plastering my hair flat.

What's my problem? My sex drive has always been high, but I haven't been this rampantly horny in years. I want to be all over him at all times—tasting, smelling, touching. I can't get enough.

I push my wild hair away from my face, and North spits and pokes at his tongue.

"What are you doing?"

"Ech, I've got a hair on my tongue."

"Here," I say, motioning.

He opens his mouth obediently, and sticks his tongue out, along with the fine blond hair coiled on top of it. I go to grab it and he lunges forward, trying to lick my hand and nip at my fingers. I jerk my hand away and scowl at him while he laughs before he sticks his tongue out again. This time he holds still as I pull the hair out and wipe it on my pants. "There you go."

"Thanks, Mal." He bumps shoulders with me.

Coach yells for us to line up again, and it's only then that I realize I just put my fingers in North's mouth on the playing field in front of everyone. It felt like such a natural move I didn't even think about it. North doesn't seem to notice.

I stuff the empty bottle and towel back into my bag and slap North on the shoulder. "Keep working hard and I'll take you for a shake later. How about that?"

He grins. "I love having a sugar daddy who gives me sugar," he says as he wriggles his helmet back on.

As we jog back, I spot Josh already at the line, staring at North with a deep crease between his heavy eyebrows like he's trying to figure out a calculus problem. Or in Josh's case, how to unlock his own front door. His eyes meet mine and then he turns away quickly, busying himself with readjusting his pads like he wasn't just staring. Shit, did he see that?

I couldn't care less what people think of me, and I have no problem with my sexuality being public. My many problems stem from what I think of myself. I have no energy left for other people's opinions. Except North's.

But North is friends with everyone on the team. He's friends with pretty much everyone at Langley College. And I'm pretty sure he does care. We seem to have the opposite problems. I'm not ok with myself, but I don't care what anyone thinks of me. North is absolutely fine with himself, but it's the opinions of others that get under his skin. Maybe if you added us together you'd get one whole healthy person with no hangups. Although, in that situation I'd be taking a hell of a lot more than I'd be giving.

The rest of the drills go past without incident, Coach pushes us hard, and we give all we can. North dazzles as usual, graceful out on the field as a long-legged gazelle. But now that I'm aware of it I notice looks thrown our way. Glances under the shadow of a helmet. Heads turn whenever North and I are together. North either doesn't notice or is doing a good job of pretending not to care, so I shrug it off.

By the time we trail back to the locker room, I'm exhausted.

***

"So, if I get good grades, how are you gonna reward me?" North asks under his breath as he peels his pads off.

The results for his bio paper will be posted later today, and he worked damn hard on it.

"I'm sure I'll think of something," I smirk.

"I was thinking . . . I like it when I can pick my own reward."

"Yeah?" I ask, imagining what kind of kink he might want to try next. He's still new to this scene and every Google search unearths a new world of opportunities. And yeah, I know his browser history. I check it in front of him sometimes. It's one of our things "OK, how about this? If you get in the top 25 percent you can pick what I do to you. But if you get lower than that, I get to do whatever I want."'

He blushes that sexy red color and smothers a smile that's bashful and rakish at the same time.

"Ok, deal," he says and holds his hand out for me.

I shake. "So, what's your request?"

The pause before he replies makes me think I might have just made a mistake. I narrow my eyes at him as he fiddles with something in his locker.

"I want you to come out with me on Friday," he says.

Damn it, the team social? I should have known he wasn't done with that.

"No," I reply flatly.

He straightens, his full attention on me now. "You just agreed that I could pick whatever I want, and you'd do it. and I want you to come out for drinks."

"That's not what I meant," I growl.

He holds up his finger. "Maybe not, but that's what you *said*."

What is he? The fucking Riddler?

"No deal." I slam my locker closed.

North lets out a frustrated noise. "Why not? You never come, you might actually enjoy yourself for once if you give it a chance."

I scowl. "I enjoy myself all the time. At home. Why do you want me to go so badly?'

"Because I like you. And I don't want to go without you."

I sigh. Growing feelings is a pain in the ass.

"Fine, we'll make a deal. But if you don't make the top 25 percent you have to drop the whole 'going out and spending time with other people' thing for good. Ok?"

"Oh my god, yes. Deal," North says and pumps his fist. "We're gonna have so much fun."

"You have to win first," I say.

North has never gotten into the top 25 percent, I believe in him and his hard work, but there's no way in hell he'll score enough to make me go on that bar crawl.

"Malcolm Blackwood coming out for a team night? Oh, I'm gonna win. The universe is behind me on this one."

I smirk to myself and finish getting ready. It's never gonna happen.

***

"Are you fucking kidding me?"

Hell has frozen over. Pigs are flying. And North jumps around on the grass of the quad pumping his fists.

"Yes. In your face, Mal."

I stare at my phone and the list of results just posted on the system. "Shit."

"Fuck yeah!" He does a dance that involves shaking his shapely ass from side to side. "I'm the best. It's official."

For fuck's sake. I've been training him too well. He's become too strong, and now he's turned on his maker. Is this how Frankenstein felt?

"Oh my god, I cannot wait for Friday night, we're gonna have so much fun."

I pinch the bridge of my nose. I brought this on myself. I flew too close to the sun, and now I'm paying the price; I have to go and

socialize.

Although I have many, many skills, *peopling* isn't one of them. Sure, the guys on the team aren't that bad, but that doesn't mean I want to sit around in a hot sticky bar drinking warm beer and listening to them brag about how many people they've fucked and in which positions. I'm drained just thinking about it.

But, shit, it looks like I'm going. North is so happy it makes my cold shriveled heart grow a couple of sizes, Grinch style. And North did do really fucking well. Underneath the dread of small talk, I'm really fucking proud of him. He deserves a treat.

I sag. It can't be that bad, right?

North stops dancing around. "Oh, we need to get our costumes ready," he says.

I freeze. "Costumes?"

North gives me a guilty look. "Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you. It's a costume thing for Halloween, ya know?"

Forgot my ass, he didn't tell me on purpose because he knew I'd refuse. I do not do costumes.

No. Fuck no. Not happening.

5

-North-

I CAN feel Mal's glare burning into the back of my head as we walk through the costume shop. I can't pretend I'm not damn giddy about this. He's coming out with us. And while we won't be out as a couple, it still feels pretty huge. Sure, I feel a little bad for pressuring him into it, but it'll be worth it when he relaxes and enjoys himself.

And the best part of all, I get to see him in a costume. It's taken everything in me not to do a little happy dance the last two days. I can't wait to see what he looks like in anything other than tasteful, black, tailored clothes.

I chew on my lip. The theme is "Wild West." Mal is going to be a cowboy. I can hardly contain my joy, but I try to, for his sake.

I pick up a hanger that has the full Woody costume and hold it up. "What about this?"

He glowers at it. I put it back. "Yeah, you're right. I think something a bit more colorful."

I wish I could bottle the expression on his face and get it out on rainy days. I haven't been this excited for a holiday event since I was like twelve on Christmas Day. Actually no, Christmas is great every year.

"If you're going to force me to humiliate myself in public, it at least has to be black," Mal grits out.

"This is my reward, remember? I get to pick."

Mal's mouth is set in a hard slash of disapproval. "I didn't realize you were a sadist."

"Hey, I can be both. I can be anything I want. You taught me that."

"Big fucking mistake," Mal grumbles. "Is it too late to take it back?"

"Yep! I believe in myself now, and it's all your fault. You should have considered the consequences when you first gave me that butt plug."

A woman in a raincoat overhears and turns to look at us, and I smile politely at her. Mal glares and she quickly gets back to browsing.

"How was I meant to know it would result in my torture and humiliation? It's meant to be the other way around."

I pick up a cowboy hat, black, and hold it out to him. He doesn't take it so I tuck it under my arm. I select a few other choice items from the shelves while Malcolm trails behind me like a storm cloud, and when I'm done I hold them up, grinning.

"Right, let's try these bad boys on."

"No," he says.

"Oh, I'll get you a gun belt too."

"No, you won't."

I add the gun belt to the pile and wave the golden card he gave me under his nose.

"You told me I had to use this more, didn't you? I'm just doing as I'm told."

"I hate you," he growls.

I grin back at him. "Nuh-uh."

***

Mal stands with his arms crossed over his broad chest and the black cowboy hat perched on his head, looking both furious and sulky. The hat is slightly too small for him, and dark strands of his hair poke out around it.

I purse my lips. I honestly don't know why I was ever afraid of him. It's the funniest, cutest thing I've ever seen in my entire life. This moment must be dedicated to memory. I debate whether I'll get away with snapping a photo of him, or if it'll end up with my phone flying out of a window. Probably best not to risk it, although he'd probably just buy me a new phone anyway.

"It suits you," I say.

"Go to hell."

I pick up the bright red vest. "Try this on, I think it'll really complete the look."

"If you bring that fucking thing anywhere near me, I'm going to burn this entire shop to the ground with you inside it," he snaps.

I can't help laughing. This is just way too much fun. "You're such a Grinch."

"That's Christmas, not Halloween."

I narrow my eyes. "How do you know what the Grinch is? Have you watched the film?"

If his eyebrows scowl any lower they'll be on his cheeks.

"Everyone knows what the Grinch is. I might not go on bar crawls, but I don't live in a fucking cave."

No, he lives in a mansion, but it might as well be a cave. The image of Mal sitting snugly in a blanket watching Christmas films just doesn't compute. Does he even have a TV? I'm pretty sure he has one in there somewhere, but now that I'm thinking about it I can't remember seeing it. We've always been too busy. Maybe it descends from the ceiling from a hidden compartment.

Ok, this tactic isn't working. I might have to employ my wily manipulation skills to get the vest on him, because damn it, I want to see him in it. This is my new life's goal.

I lean against the side of the changing room, one hip dropped. "Did I ever tell you that I have a thing for cowboys?" I say casually.

Mal huffs, too grumpy to notice my flirting tone. "That's because you're juvenile."

"I don't know, they really do it for me. I think they're hot."

He doesn't move, but his eyes roll toward me. Suspicious.

"I've always thought it'd be fun to try some stuff out. Maybe play a little dress-up?"

His glare is fixed now, and he licks his bottom lip in one swift swipe. Like a grouchy little lizard . . . wearing a cowboy hat.

"Are you really going to make me say it?" I raise my eyebrows, but he's not taking the bait. "Wear the yeehaw cowboy vest and I'll suck your dick later."

There's a long moment of silence. Then, Still glaring, he holds his hand out for it, and when I pass it over he snatches it away.

"You'd suck my dick anyway," he says.

"True. But now I get to do it in a cowboy hat."

He shrugs the vest on over his fitted black top and it pulls tight across his shoulders. It's bright red, with golden stitching and tassels along the bottom. I have to plaster my hand over my mouth to hide my smile. If looks could kill, I'd be a smear on the wall.

"You look cute."

His nostrils flare. “I look like a fucking idiot.”

“A cute fucking idiot. And it’s a perfect fit.”

“They’re both way too small.”

“Like I said, a perfect fit.”

He grumbles and starts to pull it off.

“Wait, let me try mine on first. I want to see how we look together.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s fun.” I take my costume off the hook. I’ve gone for the full getup: checked shirt, hat, bandanna, vest, chaps, and a gun belt. When I costume, I costume hard.

I pull my top off over my head. Mal’s eyes rake over my bare chest and I’m suddenly aware of how small the changing room is. There’s only a couple of feet between us, and I can feel the heat radiating off him. Was it this hot in here before? I get one arm into the shirt but the other gets away from me and I end up turning in circles like a dog chasing its tail.

“Oh for fuck sake, hold still.”

Mal grabs the shirt and holds it open for me, and I slip my arm through the hole.

“Thanks, Mal,” I say.

His fingers brush my shoulder and collarbone as I shrug it on, sending tingles of electricity through my skin.

I pause with the shirt hanging open, and the absurdity of the situation really hits me. I’m trying on cowboy costumes with the guy I was convinced absolutely hated my guts for almost a year.

He looks so silly in that outfit, the hat and vest are comically too small for him, and he’s so grumpy I wouldn’t be surprised if the furnishings started to char.

But he’s still here wearing it, because I want him to. Hell, he’s coming out with the guys, which is a miracle in itself, because I want him to. He could have refused. Sure, he pouted and moaned. But when he’s serious about it, there’s no way anyone can get Mal to do anything he doesn’t want to. Which means he wants to do it because I want him to.

He’s always putting himself way out of his comfort zone for me, even if he doesn’t say it outright. And I’m so damn grateful.

His expression softens and a crease forms between his dark eyebrows. “What’s up?”

Fuck I think I might really be falling for him. Like, *hard*.

Do I . . . love him?

The thought catches me completely off guard and I'm overwhelmed with the sudden urge to kiss him. My head spins as I lean in, and his startled expression melts into something else before he closes the gap, coming forward to meet me. We kiss, softly at first but then harder. I work his mouth open and push my tongue inside. Our teeth clash as the kiss turns frantic, two horny teenagers alone for the first time.

Then Mal sets his hands on my chest and pushes me up against the wall. The clothes rail digs into my back. He breaks the kiss and works down my throat, biting at the fading marks already there and bringing them back to full-blooming life. I want him to bite down harder, scar me, because I'm all his. Then his hand tangles in my hair and he pushes me down onto my knees. I shove his shirt up and mouth along the hard muscles of his belly, tasting his warm skin, pressing my lips to the dark hairs that trail from his navel to the top of his pants, and he groans. The noise makes everything fall away and I forget where we are. My heart pounds. I'm beyond frantic to taste him.

I unzip his fly with my teeth, the cold tang of metal on the tip of my tongue, then peel down his pants and boxers, freeing his already hard cock. Fuck me it's the best dick I've ever seen, huge and hard and veined with a slight upward curve. I want to worship it like a Pagan God of Sex. I want to be sacrificed on its altar. I want it to tear me apart.

I lick it from root to tip with a flat tongue, humming under my breath. Mal grips the hanger rail as he falls against the wall, with the other hand tangled in my hair, not pushing, but holding on for dear life. His eyes are screwed shut, his mouth tightened into a grim line. You'd think he was in pain if it wasn't for the deep-red blush staining his cheeks and the upward tilt of his eyebrows. The small cowboy hat is knocked askew, sitting at a jaunty angle on one side of his head, and the red vest is stretched right across his shoulders. The golden tassels along its edge tickle my forehead.

Well, I did say I'd suck his dick if he wore it. I'm gonna make him feel so fucking good.

I open my jaw wide and swallow him down, taking his wide cock almost to the root in one gulp. He gasps and slams his head back against the wall with a *crack.* His other arm flies out, searching for more grip, and he catches the hangers on the rail holding the rest of my costume. They go flying and hit the floor with a clatter.

I gulp around him again, working my tongue along his shaft, and the noise he makes is like a drug—

"Excuse me?" says a voice through the door.

I choke and pull off Mal's cock. Shit, what the fuck am I doing? We're still in the costume shop changing room, which apparently has paper thin walls. Mal's eyes snap open and he freezes like a deer in headlights as I turn my head toward the door.

"Is everything ok in there?" the voice says in a way that hints that they know everything is *not* ok in here.

I hold still, on my knees, gripping onto Mal's naked thighs, his wet cock an inch from my face. I cough and try to sound normal.

"Y-yeah. Everything's fine. Just having an issue with the costume." My voice is rough and far too high-pitched. We look at each other. Mal looks so aghast in his cowboy hat and vest that it's almost too much. The urge to laugh bubbles up inside me and I have to press my lips tight. There's a heavy pause from outside and then . . .

"This is a family shop."

My face burns and I bury it into Mal's thick thigh. "Yeah. Sorry."

"I'm going to have to ask you to leave."

Fair enough.

"Right. Ok. sorry."

Mal flops his head back against the wall and pinches the bridge of his nose.

6

-Malcolm-

“WELL, I don’t think they’re ever going to let us back in there again,” North says as we pull up at the drive-through. Yeah, we’re getting burgers. North and his trashy food habits are eating away at my self-control. But damn this greasy shit tastes good every once in a while.

“What a shame,” I say.

I pull forward and collect our four burgers and fries from the lady at the window. Plus a strawberry shake for North, extra cream, extra syrup. Three of the burgers are for me. I have a large appetite.

North pulls a face. “That was my favorite costume shop. They had the full Avengers range, and all of the teenage mutant ninja turtles in adult sizes.”

I try not to imagine North in a turtle costume and fail miserably.

He shoves a handful of french fries into his mouth. “Still, it was nice of them to let us buy the costumes before they kicked us out.”

From what I remember it wasn’t so much “let” and more “marched us to the checkout.” The old woman would have been pointing a shotgun at us if she had one.

“I think they probably would have had to burn them if we didn’t take them,” I say.

North snorts. Now that the horror of being caught getting sucked off in a family costume store while dressed as a cowboy has faded, I can see why it would be funny.

But wow, that got hot and heavy fast. One minute I was feeling ridiculous in an outfit clearly three sizes too small for me, and the next, North was looking at me with that soft hot look he gets where his eyes go all gooey. Like I’m the best thing to ever crawl out of god’s glorious ass. He’s been doing it more and more recently and it makes me feel *things*.

And to be honest, it's confusing as hell. I have no idea why he seems to like me so much. It feels like a fever dream that might vanish if I try to concentrate on it too much. I'm just waiting for it to end, and I'm utterly terrified of waking up. I'm in too deep now, far deeper than I ever wanted to be. He's worked his way inside me, kicking out the self-protective structures I've put in place as he goes, so that now it's only him holding me up. If it all goes wrong now what's left of my heart is going to cave in, collapse, crumble, until all I am is a ruin of a person; dust, and rubble.

I don't know how I got into this mess, but I'm holding on with two hands and praying like fuck I don't screw it up.

We head back to my place for our usual study session, and the rest of the day goes past far too quickly. Before I know it it's time to prepare for my public torture.

North scampers off to get ready in private, saying he wants a big reveal. What is he? A pregnant housewife? I go for my slim-fit black pants, a snug black T-shirt, and a pair of black boots that are close enough to cowboy boots to work without making me feel like a dickhole. It doesn't take long to actually put on the hat and vest, but it takes a considerable amount of time to quell the urge to fling them out of the bedroom window. Into the path of a passing truck. At least the hat is black.

Afterward, I linger in the kitchen, waiting for North. He's been upstairs doing god knows what for an hour already. How long can it possibly take him to shower and dress?

I check the time. We're supposed to be meeting the others at the bar at half past eight. At this rate, we're going to be late, and while I hate socializing, I loathe being late even more. My skin crawls as the hand ticks down toward quarter past. We still need to drive, find parking, and get to the bar.

I huff and March to the bottom of the stairs, arms crossed. The vest pulls tightly across my shoulders, and I huff again.

"North," I yell up the stairs. "Hurry the fuck up."

"I'm almost done," comes his distant reply.

I glower. "Don't make me come up there and get you."

Actually, There's a thought. I let myself play that out in my head. After the half blow job earlier, and being on edge with all this "going out and seeing real people" shit, I haven't had a chance to relieve my ever-increasing sexual tension. Normally I'd have stripped North off the

moment we got back, strapped him down, and released some hot tension all over him. But I haven't had a chance today and the old familiar buzz is starting to kick up at the back of my head. Plus, I said he could drink tonight, so I'm not going to be able to fuck him afterward either. I don't do drunk sex, even if it's not the hardcore stuff. There's too much fog around consent and too much that can go wrong. I'll have to keep it bottled up until tomorrow.

The hand hits twenty past and I'm about to charge up there and drag him down when he appears at the top of the stairs.

"Howdy, partner," North drawls.

I stare as he descends like a débutante. He didn't get a chance to try on his full costume before things got out of hand at the shop. He looks fucking ridiculous. Cowhide chaps over blue jeans, checked shirt rolled to the elbows, vest, red bandanna around his neck, gun belt with two bright blue toy guns hung low on his hips. And of course, the white cowboy hat with a golden sheriff star, perched on the back of his head at a jaunty angle.

He looks like he got in a fight with a kid's dress-up rack and lost. And the worst bit is, he looks fucking sexy as hell. Goddammit.

I will never admit out loud how hot he looks. Never. I'm going to take it to my grave.

He jumps off the bottom step, quick draws his toy guns, and mimes shooting at me with a *pew pew* noise.

"What do you think?"

"You look like you're about to go trick or treating with your mom," I say.

He reholsters his guns, giving it all the sass of a Western B movie.

"Nah, that's at the weekend. Tonight, we party."

I can't help but snort, and he looks me up and down, grin widening.

"Damn, you look hot. Hey, where's your gun belt?"

"In the same place as my dignity."

"All right, but I'm not going to jump in and save you if you get into a gun-slinger duel situation." The twinkle in his eye is infectious.

We have to go right now or we really are going to be late, but he's so distracting. My horny hindbrain is telling me to finish what we started earlier, but I manage to suppress it. That is until he moves close to me and pauses with his lips an inch from mine. Every time he does this my heart hammers, and every time I think I'm going to chicken out and run

away. And every time I'm pulled to him like he's my center of gravity. Our lips meet, and he's sweet and soft, and everything I'm not.

He pulls away enough to speak against my lips.

"Thanks for doing this. It really means a lot to me."

I rumble in my throat. "Don't worry, you're going to pay me back later."

He laughs against my mouth, and our hats knock together and sit askew. His messy blond hair flops out rakishly under it. He smells like my shower gel and something sweet. He always smells sweet, even when he's been sweating like a pig in his football gear, there's always a candy tang. Probably all that sugar he eats. But it makes me want to lick him.

Dammit, why did he have to kiss me? I was doing so well, but now I'm going to have to fuck him. There's no getting around it. He goes to pull away but I can't stop myself from pursuing him.

I slide my lips from his, feeling the fine hairs of his stubble under my tongue.

"Mal we have to—" he breaks off with a startled noise that melts into something deeper as I press my stiffening dick against him, feeling his own bulge growing in response. The pulse at his throat races against my lips as he gulps.

The stupid bandanna gets in the way of my progress, obstructing me from getting at the sweet flesh at the base of his neck. And I can think of a much better use for it. I tug it off, then slide down his arms, gather both his hands behind him, and tie them together at the small of his back, tugging the bandanna tight. Much better.

He makes a helpless noise as I spin him and press him up against the cream wall at the bottom of the stairs, one cheek to the brickwork. The way he flattens himself against it without question, surrendering to my control instinctively, is delicious.

I dig my fingers into the waistband of his jeans and tug them down as far as they'll go, just enough to expose his ass. The curve of his cheeks framed by the chaps awakens something in me. I've never been into roleplay but maybe it's time to try, because his ass looks remarkably fuckable right now.

"Your tight ass is just waiting for me to ruin it," I snarl.

I fit my hand around his throat, squeezing just enough to feel his racing pulse stammer against my fingers and cut off his air for a

second. When I do, his mouth falls open and he shudders. I stick my fingers between his lips.

"Suck," I command him, and he does, taking them as far into his greedy mouth as he can and lapping at them. "That's right, Nolan. Get them good and wet. These are going inside you."

He moans, the noise half strangled under my hand. I pull them out with a wet pop, then work him open with them. His hands clench at the small of his back as I work my fingers inside, feeling the drag of his rim against my not-quite-wet enough fingers. I tut.

"Looks like you didn't get them wet enough."

He hisses as I fit two digits in and spread them, stretching his hole out a bit at a time. I lean into him, pressing the swell of my dick into his bound hands.

"Want me to fuck you hard in your stupid cowboy costume?" I rasp against his neck.

"Yes. Please," he moans.

I spit at the crack of his ass and jerk my fingers in and out, scissoring in harsh movements until he's open enough. It's rough and frenzied, and he fucking loves it judging by the needy noises he's making and the way his muscles are jumping. Such a good little slut for me.

I make him free my dick with his tied hands, I'm too busy finger fucking and choking him out. He fumbles with my fly and pants, managing to get them open and down just enough, and then my cock is out and I slide it into his hands and up the small of his back, smearing precum on the back of his vest.

Keeping one hand tight on his throat, I reach around and slip my other hand between the wall and his body. His dick is still half-trapped in his jeans, flat against the wall. I whip it out and jerk it, feeling the sensitive skin drag against my palm. He's leaking precum and it's not enough to make it smooth, but he doesn't seem to care, his hips jerk with minute thrusts into my hand. It's all he can manage with me pinning him.

He whines when I let go of his cock long enough to spit into my hand. Mental note to myself: start carrying a packet of lube with me wherever I go. Saliva will have to do for now, though, because now that I've started there's no way I'm going to be able to break off to go on a lube hunt. I work the spit over the length of my cock and press it

between the peachy curves of his asscheeks, wedged between the chaps.

"You ready?" I ask.

He nods, his eyes fluttering closed in anticipation.

"Please," he rasps.

"Let me know if it's too much, Okay?" I murmur.

He nods again and I push forward. He jerks and gasps as I enter.

I try to hold back as long as I can for his sake, but he's so tight and warm. When his grunts turn into moans of pleasure again, and his body melts against me, I pick up the pace until I'm ramming in hard and fast.

He leans his head back against my shoulder and I take his throat again, squeezing in time and feeling the vibration of his noises against my palm.

He half turns his head to the side, his lips open, and I capture his mouth in a sloppy kiss while I jerk his cock with my other hand and fuck him into the wall. More cum spills out of him, coating my pumping hand, making it glide over his cock. He's bucking his hips, pressing back against me with each thrust and pushing into my fist.

I bite down on his lip, and he groans into my mouth. With how tightly I'm wound, I'm not going to last long, but I'm determined to make him come before me.

"Oh, fuck, Mal. Oh, fuck. Fuck." His voice is breathy and strained. "Fuck, I'm gonna-Mal—"

He breaks off in a shuddering whine, his legs shake, and warmth spills over my hand as he comes.

I'm only a hair's breadth behind, hanging on by a thread. I thrust into him hard and fast. Once. Twice. He cries out. My fingers close on his neck. his cum drips down my hand. The cowboy vest brushes against the base of my cock. I slam into him one last time, and my climax hits.

I collapse against him and mouth at his neck as my hips jerk in little aborted thrusts and I fill him with my cum. His lips find mine and we kiss, long and sloppy, breathing hard against each other's mouths. We stay like that for some time, slumped against the wall until I can think again.

"So you do like my costume," North pants.

"No," I snarl. "I like you." Then I groan. "Fuck, we're going to be so late."

7

-Malcolm-

WHEN I finally park the Porsche up around the back of the bar, we're already an hour late and I want to peel my skin off. North doesn't seem to care though. He practically falls out of the car with excitement when he opens the door, then comes around to my side when I apparently don't get out fast enough for him, and pulls on my arm. Big golden retriever energy.

I cleaned us up as fast as I could after our speed fuck. But it still required another shower, fresh underwear, and dry wiping our costumes to get the worst of the cum stains out. There weren't any clean pants for me to wear so I had to pull some out of the dirty laundry from a few days ago, and they still have the half packet of cigarettes in the back pocket that I confiscated off North. It makes me feel gross but it's all I've got.

It was a rough fuck, and I didn't want to rush the aftercare, but North assured me he was fine and any hope of canceling went out the window. Even so, he's walking a bit stiffly for my liking.

It's impossible to keep a good North down, and as we go around to the front, he's practically vibrating. He holds onto my arm until we're inside the swinging doors, as if he's worried I might try to run away. But I'm committed now. I said I'd come, and I'm here, no matter how much I regret it.

The guys are gathered around a table in the back corner of the bar, but it's impossible to miss them; they're all dressed as cowboys and are by far the loudest group in the place. North drops my arm as we approach, and that's just another reason for me to be irritated.

The guys see him and cheer, raising their beer bottles. Then they notice me, and they all fall silent as one, like I'm a turd they've just found in their birthday cake. I guess North forgot to tell them I was coming. It makes me feel marginally better.

“Hey guys,” North says in the ringing silence.

That seems to make them recover themselves enough to stop staring at me, and Josh finds his voice first.

“Malcolm. You came,” he says. If he’s trying not to sound perturbed, he’s failing.

I skewer him with a look. “I’m just as shocked as you.”

He laughs nervously, but I can see there’s something else going on with the way he’s looking at me. It’s the same look he was giving us on the field. And again, he averts his eyes.

I’m going to have to be careful here.

There are two free seats on either side of the table, which is probably best for the sake of appearances. North goes around for the far one, we sit, and the chatter resumes, although not quite to its previous volume. They seem spooked by my presence. The glimmer of pride I feel at that is quickly snuffed out. The stool is uncomfortable, the table is sticky, the air smells of stale beer, and the vest pulls tight across my shoulders. I feel like my skin is five sizes too small for me. I have a feeling it’s going to be a long night.

Once we’re settled in, Steve, in a brown cowboy hat and fake mustache, jumps up. “My round. Waddaya want, Alaska?” he says in a strained Western accent.

“Beer me, bro,” North replies, shooting a set of finger guns his way.

I frown. Bro. North never says “bro” around me. Nice one, bro. That’s totally awesome, bro. Sweet ass, bro. I love it when you fuck me hard, bro. North, the social chameleon.

Steve with the mustache turns to me and hesitates. “Do you want a drink Malcolm?” he asks, like he’s not sure if I consume liquids like a regular human at all, or if it’ll melt me into a puddle of green slime.

I shake my head. It’s been four years since I had a drop of alcohol. in my teens I hit the booze hard, in the certain belief that it made things easier to deal with. But it didn’t, it only made everything worse. Now I hate the feeling of not being in complete control over my body.

“I don’t drink,” I say.

He looks relieved, nods, and heads to the bar.

I settle back in my uncomfortable chair, stretch my booted legs out under the table, and scratch a finger under the cowboy hat, trying not to scowl as North chats away on the other side of the table.

Well, here I am. I’m keeping my promise. I’m being a good . . . whatever I am to North. Now I just have to endure this hell known as

“socializing” until he’s ready to go. And as soon as we get back to my place I’m going to dump these fucking costumes in a trash can, pour gasoline over them, and burn them.

I look over at North and relive fucking him against the wall at the bottom of the stairs with those cowhide chaps. The chair creaks under me as I shift.

Ok, I concede, maybe I’ll just burn my costume. North can keep his in case he wants to do that again one day. But only if he suggests it, because there’s no way in hell I’m going to.

The talk goes back to inane stuff—girls, sports, funny videos. They chat and laugh and drink, and North is at the center of it, radiating charm and that indescribable North-ness. Looking at him now, you’d think he didn’t have a care in the world. The way he talks, the way he moves, it’s enthralling. And when he looks at you it’s like you’re the most important person in the room. In any room. He has a magnetic pull, and the others are sucked into orbit, planets revolving around his sun.

I’m so lost in thought I don’t notice one of the guys leaning into my space until stale breath washes over the side of my face, and I drag my eyes away from North. Randy, one of the beefy linemen, is peering at me, hazy eyes above red cheeks. He’s either been necking beers since he arrived, or he’s a total lightweight. I lean away from him, letting the distaste show on my face, but he doesn’t seem to notice.

“Hey, Malcolm,” he says, with another gust of warm beer breath. “How come you decided to come this time? This has got to be, what, the first time ever? What happened, man?”

I glance over at North briefly. “I just felt like it,” I say.

“Cool.” Randy burps under his breath. “Sweet hat by the way, bro. Think you got mixed up in the kiddy section.” He flicks the brim clumsily with his knuckles, knocking it back on my head, and laughs, giving me a good view of his tonsils. I cross my arms and glare. No one is allowed to insult my undersized cowboy hat but me. He catches my look, stops laughing abruptly, and turns back to his drink.

Steve with the mustache lugs a bucket of beers down in the middle of the table, and everyone grabs one. North raises his bottle to his lips and I track his throat as he gulps, my mouth watering. It’s like the best beer commercial I’ve ever seen.

“Hey, Mal, what did you think about it?”

I blink and realize North is looking at me. They all are. But I have no idea what they've been talking about.

"What?" I say.

"You know, the final touchdown of the game. That was on TV last night." He waits for me to respond, then prompts. "That was intense right?"

I didn't watch the game, and he knows it. He smiles at me encouragingly, though, and I know exactly what he's doing. He's trying to draw me in, get me involved in the conversation. Include me. God, I hate small talk, and joining in is the last thing I want to do, but he's giving me those puppy dog eyes, and I have to give him something.

I purse my lips. "Yeah, it was really something."

It's not much but as the guys turn back to him, satisfied with my brief answer, North gives me the brightest smile. It's almost embarrassing how obviously proud he is of my barest effort but he's still happy that I'm trying. And damn, that makes my chest ache. It makes me want to try harder for him. He keeps making me want to do things to make him happy.

Like, what am I doing here? A few weeks ago this wouldn't have happened, so what's changed now? Whatever it is it feels big. Earth moving. North is altering me in ways I don't even know, and while that terrifies the hell out of me, I can't make it stop. I want him so badly every moment of the day. And not just for sex. I want to be near him, to feel the warmth that radiates from him, from his skin, but also from his fucking soul. I want him to see me, to validate me. And it's embarrassing how much I need it at this point.

I was right, he *is* like the sun; he's pulled me in and now there's no hope of escape. But I'm not orbiting around him like the other guys are. Where they bathe in the warmth and joy he radiates, I actively take from him. I feed off him to fill the empty space inside my bones. I'm not a planet in his solar system, I'm a black hole.

Just for a moment, I wonder what it would be like to feel how North feels. To just relax, go with the flow, and enjoy myself. I yearn for that easiness. I don't know if I can ever get it, but at this moment I want to at least try. And that means putting effort in.

At the other end of the table, Josh stands up and declares. "Who's in for shots?" The guys raise their bottles amid shouts of "yeehaw." I take a deep breath. Guess now's a good time to start.

“Hey,” I say loud enough to be heard above the din. Josh looks up, along with the rest of the table. “I’m in.”

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The shot burns all the way down, making my eyes water and my breath catch. I almost gag and have to bang my fist against my chest to stop myself from choking in front of everyone. I can see why I gave this shit up. Whatever moment of madness overtook me erodes as the spirit singes my esophagus.

“Are you ok?” North asks from across the table, a crease between his dirty blond eyebrows.

He’s still recovering from the shock of me joining in; the way his eyes widened you’d think he sat down on a well-lubed zucchini.

“Fine,” I say, clearing my throat.

For the next half hour, the alcohol—I didn’t ask what kind it was—is like a fire in my stomach, and I can feel the warmth of it spreading outward. It makes my ears and fingers tingle, and it spreads to my brain, too, like a cozy blanket wrapping around it. I rub my forehead. My muscles unwind, my shoulders loosen. And, yeah, okay, it feels pretty good.

My resolve to only have one drink dissolves along with my tension, and when the next round of shots comes, I barely try to talk myself out of it before I slam back another, this time enjoying the way it burns as it goes down.

When I put the glass back down on the sticky table, North is watching me with that same attractive crease between his eyebrows. God, he’s hot.

And when someone asks who’s in for the next round and I raise my hand, he stands up and nods his head toward the terrace. After an appropriate pause, I follow him out. My head rushes a little when I get to my feet, and I blink hard a few times. I must have been sitting down for too long. And again, when I step outside and the cold air hits me, I waver.

It’s dark out and the terrace is lit up with string lights. The tiny orbs reflect in North’s blue eyes as he peers at me.

“Are you ok?” he says.

“I’m fine. Why?”

He frowns. “I know I made you come out, but you don’t have to join in with the drinking if you don’t want to,” North says. “You don’t drink.”

His concern is cute but unneeded—I’m in perfect control of the situation. I step closer to him. “Believe me, I never do anything I don’t want to,” I say in a husky voice.

Which is a pretty big lie, especially recently when it comes to North. But whatever, it sounds cool.

“When was the last time you drank any alcohol?” North asks, unintimidated. “Your tolerance is probably really low.”

“I’m just relaxing a little, ok? Like you suggested. Don’t get your jockstrap in a twist.”

His frown deepens. “Hey. I’m not, I just want to make sure—”

I grab the bandanna tied around his neck and jerk him into me bodily, covering his lips with mine. I kiss him hard, tasting the beer and shots, and the extra spicy pizza someone got delivered to the table, still on his tongue.

There are other people on the terrace but they’re not paying attention to two cowboys making out, and even if they were, I don’t give a fuck. I feel loose and good, and I’m halfway to rocking a boner already.

North grunts and pulls away. His lips are swollen, and his hat is wonky. Mmm, he looks so good when he’s fucked up, and I want to go further. But a small voice at the back of my mind tells me that’s a bad idea.

Instead, I reach into my pocket and pull out North’s half squashed packet of cigarettes.

“Hey, I thought you threw those away?” North says.

“I guess I forgot.” I knock one out, then put it between North’s lips. I light it for him, borrowing a lighter from a woman smoking nearby. He draws in the smoke and sighs.

“How come I’m allowed this?” he asks.

I shrug. “I’m in a good mood. Plus, it looks kinda sexy. But this is the last one. If I ever catch you smoking again, you’re not going to be able to sit down for a week.”

He raises his eyebrow and takes another drag, blowing smoke through his nose in a lazy plume. “Is that supposed to be a threat?”

“You slut.”

He laughs and I pluck the cigarette from his fingers. His eyes track me as I drag in a breath, the same way mine tracked him. That look,

mixed with the smoke, gives me a heady rush, and then a second later I'm coughing. Smoking is another thing I haven't done for a very long time.

North takes the cigarette back again. "You're right, very sexy. I think some spit landed on my face."

I want to say something smart back, but my throat is too raw and my head is spinning, so I just pull a face at him. I've been dreading this, but I'm actually having fun. How the hell did North manage to get me to enjoy myself? Sneaky bastard.

He laughs and waves the cigarette under my nose. "You're too delicate for these." His eyes sparkle in the lights, and he tips his head for me to come closer. "Here. I've always wanted to try this."

He takes a drag and then leans in close. I part my lips and he blows the warm smoke into my mouth.

My face tingles. My nose feels numb. And North's face is only an inch away from mine.

Is this what it feels like to be happy?

8

-North-

WHAT IN the eight circles of sexy hell has gotten into Mal? I don't know if I should be worried or excited that he's relaxing and starting to enjoy himself, but he's acting so un-Malcolm-like it's kinda freaking me out.

Drinking and smoking? I mean, don't get me wrong I'm not complaining. The red flush to his cheeks and the way he blows the smoke at me out of his barely parted lips is sexy as hell, but it's just *. . . weird*. Maybe I need to take my own advice and relax a bit. He's a big boy, he knows what he's doing.

We finish off the cigarette and head back inside. When we get to the table someone's bought another round of shots, and to my horror, Mal takes another one and slams it back in one swift gulp, then licks the alcohol off his glistening bottom lip in a way that makes me want to suck it.

He reaches out for another one and I catch his arm. "Mal, I think that's enough for now," I say.

"I thought I was the one in charge," Mal snarls. He squares off to me, bumping his puffed-up chest against mine, but he's smiling, and I can't help giggling. Drunk Mal is funny.

I notice Josh is eyeing us and I back off a step.

Josh is one of my closest friends on the team, and he's a good guy. If he knew the truth he probably wouldn't have an issue with it. *Probably*. And that's the problem. I don't want to risk it.

Mal doesn't seem to notice me backing off, and Josh gets drawn into a conversation about dogs learning to drive. That was close. I'm going to have to be more careful if we're going to keep this relationship a secret, especially if Mal is letting loose.

I realize that might be harder than I thought, though, when Mal takes the seat next to me and looks me up and down hungrily, making

my pulse jump. I know that look well. A second later his hand presses onto my thigh under the table. Trying to keep a straight face, I lean in and hiss at him.

"Hey, what are you doing? The guys are right here."

"Who cares." he slides his hand higher.

Oh god, my dick is already starting to take notice. But I haven't specifically told him that I don't want to come out to the guys yet because it's never been a problem. He's not usually into public affection. Or any kind of affection for that matter.

But apparently, three shots is enough to turn him into a sloppy drunk. Which would be hilarious if it wasn't so dangerous. I get up and circle to the other side of the table, where I can keep an eye on him but not be in the handsy danger zone. He narrows his eyes at me as I take my seat opposite him.

A moment later something brushes my dick and I jump, biting off a yelp. I look down to see the tip of Mal's boot wriggling between my legs and nudging at my already half-hard cock through my jeans. I bat it away, but it comes back again, kneading and rubbing at my dick. I shoot Malcolm a look and wrestle with it while trying to keep a straight face. But his foot moves harder and faster, and I can't help a little whine escaping.

The alcohol has gone to my head, and the thought of getting caught by the guys pushes me even further. My hips start to move on their own, rubbing against him, and I bite down on my lip while my face heats.

Don't close your eyes. Don't close your eyes.

Mal is watching me on the other side of the table, the cat that caught the mouse. And, Jesus, I'm starting to sweat. I can't help it, Mal being pushy is one of my many kinks. Apparently, Mal doing *anything* is.

I'm suddenly aware that someone's talking to me.

"Huh?" I say, startled.

"I said what's going on with you and Becki?" Randy says, leaning forward. "Because if you're not going to hit that I will."

I barely even think about his question as Mal digs his toes into my crotch like he's stomping out a cigarette. *Keep a straight face. Speak normally.*

"Uh, yeah go for it," I say. "She's not really my type."

Mal licks his lips, one slow sensual motion, and I bite down harder on my own. Jesus, the things he does to me.

Randy lets out a great big bellowing laugh. “Are you kidding? She’s hot as fuck! If she’s not your type, who the hell is?”

Don’t look at Malcolm. I can feel his gaze burning into the side of my head, and his boot presses down harder, twisting. I squeak and manage to turn it into words.

“I-I-I prefer dark brunettes, I guess.”

Malcolm smirks out of the corner of my eye, working my dick with his boot like a fucking magician. Oh god, what if I come in my pants? Surrounded by my teammates? Will I be able to keep a straight face? Will I be able to shuffle to the men’s room without anyone noticing? Or will I just have to sit in a cooling pool of cum for the rest of the evening?

Luckily God takes pity on me, and I don’t have to find out. Because a moment later another tray of shots lands on the table in front of us and Mal drops his foot back down to the floor so he can reach for one. If this is what he’s like on three shots, who knows what’ll happen after four? As everyone grabs their drinks, I shoot up and snatch the small glass he’s reaching for, and down it in one gulp. He narrows his eyes at me. I can practically hear the standoff music playing in the background. He goes for another. But I’m faster off the draw, I snatch that one up too and it’s gone in a second, down my throat into my belly with its friends. Everyone else has helped themselves to the drinks and Malcolm eyes the now empty tray, before working his jaw like he’s chewing a wad of tobacco.

He stands up, and I get a great view of the semi he’s sporting in his pants. Jesus, I’m surprised he doesn’t poke someone’s eye out with that thing. No one else seems to notice, though, because then Mal fishes out his card and announces to the group,

“Next rounds on me.”

The guys cheer and someone shouts. “You need to come out more often, Malcolm. You’ve been holding out on us.”

Jesus Christ. What have I created?

A little while later Mal comes back to the table with a tray, but before he sets it down he pauses and takes his time selecting a drink, raises it at me in a “cheers” motion, and drinks it. Then he sets the tray down, sits down next to me, and places the glass upside down on the table by my elbow. Point proven, he sucks on his bottom lip and hands me a shot.

“Hey,” he says.

I narrow my eyes at his suddenly innocent expression. “Hey yourself. Having fun?”

“Yeah, I actually am,” he says. He blinks slowly and smiles a little crooked smile. “Thanks for making me come.”

“No problem,” I say.

“And in return,” he continues, leaning in conspiratorially, “I’ll make you come too.”

I choke into my drink and slap a hand over my mouth. “Mal!”

He laughs and sits back in his chair. I can’t be mad at him, he looks so cute. I know Mal doesn’t drink, but I didn’t realize he was such a lightweight. Four shots in and he already looks like he’s reaching the end of his limit.

In a very un-Malcolm move, he drops his head down onto my shoulder. I want to run my fingers through his hair, but I restrain myself. I think the guys might have a thing or two to say if I started petting Malcolm at the table. we’re walking on thin ice as it is, but thankfully it seems like the others are getting too drunk to notice.

“I’m sorry,” Mal says quietly.

“What for?”

“For being an asshole. I don’t mean it, you’re really nice.” His words slur slightly. “I just can’t help it sometimes. Sorry.”

Mal’s apologizing to me? Now I know he really must be drunk. “That’s ok,” I say. “I kinda like your assholey charm.”

He sighs hot air against my neck. “I mean it. You’re really nice. So nice.”

Ok, so drunk Mal is a total cutie. I have to say, I didn’t see this coming.

“Thanks,” I whisper back.

He tilts his head slightly, tipping it into the side of my neck, and his lips move against me.

“Whoa,” I say, leaning away. As much as I like it, the guys might be drunk but they’d have to be blind not to notice that.

Mal frowns at me, lifting his head. “Hey, I was lying there.”

He grumbles to himself and reaches across the table for another drink, even though there’s only empty glasses on the tray now. His hand knocks a half-empty beer bottle over and it sloshes across the table and down his front.

“Shit,” I say, jumping up.

“Wha’?” Mal blinks at me. “Are you ok?”

I grab a napkin and dry him off as best as I can with it, dabbing at his chest and stomach. He’s completely soaked his shirt. How is he this drunk already? He’s only had four drinks. The poor guy doesn’t know what he’s doing, and I can’t help feeling like it’s my fault. I made him come, and I told him to “fit in.”

“Ok, I think it’s time to get you home, Mal,” I say. “Come on.”

“Why?” he protests as I pull him out of his seat, but he doesn’t try to stop me. He sways a little and I get one of his arms around my shoulder.

“I’m gonna get Mal back to his house, I think he’s had enough for one night.”

“But he’s barely had anything,” one of them complains.

“Yeah, let him buy a few more rounds first, Alaska.”

I turn to the door, taking Mal with me, and call over my shoulder.

“See you later guys.”

“Have fun!” one of them shouts after us and there’s a round of sniggering that makes me glad they can’t see my face. I don’t know what they meant by that, but I have other things to think about right now.

9

-North-

WHEN WE get to the car, I curse. Of course Mal can't drive, he's wasted. And I can't either. Even if I wasn't drunk enough to be over the limit, I don't have my license. Driver's ed was not my strong point in high school.

Shit, it looks like we're gonna have to walk it. Mal's place is on the other side of the campus, an hour away from here. Mal leans his weight on me, and I struggle to hold him up; he's made of pure muscle and heavy as fuck. There's no way I'm going to make it to his place.

Which leaves us with one option. As much as I want to avoid it, we'll have to go back to my dorm.

I cast a look back at the pristine Porsche sitting in the grubby parking lot. *Sorry buddy*, I think. *We'll come back for you tomorrow.* I hope it survives the night.

It should be a twenty-minute walk to my dingy dorm room from the bar, but with Mal leaning on me the whole way, swaying and pressing his face into the side of my neck, it ends up taking us forty. His hands roam over my body, touching and grabbing everything they can, trying to get in the front of my pants and mumbling something about peaches into my neck.

He has to be the lightest weight drinker I've ever met. The featherweight champion. Who'd have thought big scary Malcolm Blackwood would be brought down by four shots?

I'm not even slightly upset about having to leave the bar early, because it's my fault he's like this. I feel so guilty, and the urge to protect him, take him home, and wrap him up in blankets is all-consuming.

When we finally get to my dorm, I let us into the tiny room and steady him toward the bed, kicking crap on the floor out of the way as we go.

He flops his butt down onto the bed so hard I'm surprised it doesn't give under his weight. His cowboy hat is somehow still on his head, and he tips forward precariously, going face first toward the carpet until I grab his shoulders and brace him with my chest, pushing him up again.

"Whoa there, cowboy," I say and I wrestle him down into a lying position on the bed and take his hat off, but he snatches it back out of my hands.

"That's my little hat!" he growls.

I laugh and hold my hands up. "All right, all right, sorry. you can keep it. I thought you didn't like it."

"Of course I do, it's a little cowboy hat. Cowboys are fucking cool."

He jams the hat back on his head, making his dark hair poke out at all angles. Then he lunges and grabs my shoulders. I almost go tumbling right on top of him but manage to catch myself against the wall.

"Hey, what are you doing?"

He pulls on me again and he's so strong it almost dislocates my arm. "Come on, North, let's fuck."

I manage to escape his grip and bat his hands away when he tries again. "We're not having sex, Mal."

"Why?" he whines.

"Because you're drunk."

He pouts. "No, I'm not. You're drunk."

His words come out slurred and I raise an eyebrow at him.

He grumbles. "Do as I say."

"No."

"I'll punish you for this."

"Uh-huh, sure."

I should try to get his cowboy vest off, but that means going into the horny Mal danger zone, so he'll just have to sleep in it. Instead, I carefully press him down onto the pillow, keeping the hat in place, and pull my blanket up around his shoulders until he's snug.

"You'll be sorry!" he declares as he nestles down. "Dildos in every hole! I fucking mean it. Nostrils, ear holes, everything."

He shouldn't be so adorable when he's threatening me. I can't help laughing until my eyes water and I have to wipe them on my sleeve. When I'm done, Malcolm's eyes roll up to me without moving his head, like he's afraid to move.

"The room's spinning, North."

“Yeah, it’ll do that, buddy. Just try to relax, it’ll pass.”

His eyes roll around again, taking the space in.

“This room is tiny. And it smells like feet. You should live with me instead.”

My heart stutters in my chest, and the last traces of laughter cut off abruptly. Even though he probably doesn’t even know what he’s saying right now, the thought of officially moving in with him makes my heart do a little dance. I’d give anything for him to ask me that when he isn’t drunk out of his mind. Still, it’s nice to hear.

“That’d be lovely, Mal,” I say in a soothing voice.

“You’re really hot. I like your eyes. They’re so nice. And you’re nice.”

Another non sequitur. “Thanks,” I say softly.

“You’re so nice. You’re almost too nice, actually. It’s like, whoa there, stop being so *fucking nice.”*

“Is that a bad thing?” I ask.

He shakes his head, barely keeping his eyes open. “No. It’s really good. But it makes me feel bad.”

“Why?”

“’Cause I’m not nice.”

I tilt my head at him. “I think you are.”

“Yeah, well, you must not know me very well,” he says sadly.

I sigh. “You’re not half as mysterious as you think you are, champ,” I say. “You *are* nice underneath this sexy bad boy act you do, you just don’t want anyone to know it.”

He blinks at me slowly like he’s trying to process what I just said, then his face creases and he looks away and rubs a hand across his eyes.

“It’s easier that way,” he murmurs. “Nice people get fucked.” Then he looks back and waves an unsteady finger at me. “Case in point.”

I can’t argue there, I’m lovable as hell and I get fucked a whole lot. “Yeah but what if they *like* getting fucked?” I counter.

He barks out an abrupt laugh and flops his hand back down onto the bed. “Touché.”

He looks like he’s about to drift off, and I know I should let him, but I just can’t help digging, because something about what he said is niggling at me.

“Mal, where did you get that little nugget of shit wisdom? That nice people get fucked?”

“My dad,” Mal says. “I know, he’s an asshole. You don’t have to tell me.”

That surprises me. Not that his father would say something like that—some dads can be incredibly shitty—but that Mal would even talk about him. He’s never mentioned his dad once in the entire time I’ve known him. Do I think it’s weird? Sure, but I haven’t exactly given my full family history either. Our conversations don’t tend to involve talking about ourselves very much.

His father is a bit of a mystery to me. Other than the fact that he’s filthy rich I don’t know anything about him, and I don’t believe any of the stupid rumors about selling illegal guns to the Mafia either.

The urge to keep asking questions is strong, but I can’t do it now while he’s drunk. That wouldn’t be fair.

“I’m sorry he’s an asshole,” I say.

Mal shifts, his shoulders alone almost span the width of the small bed. “Yeah, me fucking too.”

And with that, his eyes drift closed, clearly done for the night. I sit down on the foot of the bed, pull his feet into my lap, and start working his boots off. He doesn’t move as I tug at the laces.

I wonder what kind of childhood he had, or what his relationship with his parents is like. I don’t talk about my own family a lot, but I still visit them at least once every few weeks. Now that I think about it, I can’t remember him ever doing the same, or his family visiting him either. I don’t even know if he has any siblings. The woman in that photo in his bedroom must have been his mom, but maybe his parents aren’t together anymore if his dad is an asshole.

Unanswered questions bubble up inside me and there’s so much I want to know about him, but it’ll have to wait.

I get one boot off, set it down on the floor, and get to work on the other.

“He gave me the scar. Did you know that?” Mal mutters into the blanket.

I stop with his boot halfway off his foot and look up at him. His eyes are still closed, his face blank. He said it so quietly I’m not sure if I heard it right.

“What?”

“The scar,” he murmurs. “Happy fucking birthday, sport. This year you get stitches.”

My stomach drops through the floor. No, I can't be hearing this right. I shake my head. "The scar on your back? Your dad did that?"

He just lifts his arm up and flicks his hand in a lazy whipping motion. "*Crack*."

I stare at him, my chest tight as I ask, "Was it an accident?"

Now he opens his eyes and stares up at the ceiling, and I realize with a jolt that they're wet. He's crying. A smile spreads across his face, wide, tight, and strained. "Nope."

"Shit, Mal." I don't know what to say, but I feel sick. His dad gave him that massive scar. Why? How? The questions linger on my tongue, but I can't ask them, so I just stare at him instead, my mouth hanging open. He closes his eyes again, but the smile stays in place as a tear leaks out of the corner of his eye and traces down the side of his face.

"D'ya see why I'm so fucked up now? So, so fucking fucked."

Oh god, Mal is crying, and I don't know what to do. I want to wrap him up in a big hug, and If this was anyone else I wouldn't even hesitate. But he doesn't do hugs, he doesn't do cuddling. I don't know if that's just part of his tough-guy front, or if he actually doesn't like it. Without knowing his history, I have no idea. Would trying to hug him now trigger him in some way and make him feel worse?

I've never seen him so vulnerable before and it makes me feel useless not knowing how to help him, how to make him feel better. My throat is so tight it makes me choke.

"I'm so sorry, Mal," I say.

His eyes crack open again and he looks at me.

"What for?" he sounds genuinely confused, like he's already forgotten what he just told me. I hesitate.

"It doesn't matter," I say softly. "Just get some sleep."

He watches me for a moment, eyes groggy and fuzzy.

"This is too hard," he says.

"What is?" I ask, now dreading the answer.

"Wanting you. It's too much."

I bite my lip. I don't know how to comfort him, and the guilt is killing me. I should never have made him come out with me, I should have accepted that he didn't want to, but I was selfish, and I just couldn't let it go.

"I'm sorry for pushing you," I say as I ease his boot the rest of the way off and put it on the floor. Then I carefully put his legs back on the bed, cover them with the blanket, and stand up.

“Get some sleep. There’s water on the side, and a bowl here in case you need to puke. I’ll sleep over here on the floor, ok?”

“Don’t go.” He shoots up, nearly toppling off the bed, and I freeze.

“I’m not leaving, I’ll just be down here,” I say.

That settles him a little, but he still looks at me with wet pleading eyes. “I don’t want to sleep on my own. Will you stay with me?”

The lump in my throat grows. That’s almost exactly what I said to him when he stayed with me that first night in his spare room. The night he marked my body for himself. And now he’s asking me as if he’s not sure what the answer will be. As if I would ever say no.

“Of course I’ll stay with you.” I sit on the edge of the bed. “I’ll do whatever you want, Mal. I’m here for you.”

“Can I have a hug?” he asks.

It hits me like a punch in the heart.

I claim I know him, but that’s bullshit isn’t it? Because with those words, so lost and unsure, it suddenly becomes clear just how much he’s hiding behind the front he puts up. Under the bravado, the cold carelessness, the pathological need to control everything, this is what’s there. The photo I saw in his room flashes through my mind. The shy little boy with the tentative smile in that photo is still here, right in front of me. He’s bigger and rougher and a little bit broken, but it’s still him.

And fuck, it hits me like a bolt of lightning; I’m going to protect him from everything and anything I can. Even if I have to protect him from the monsters inside his own head. Because I love him.

“Sure, Mal,” I say gently. “You can have a hug if that’s what you want.”

He moves over and I slide in beside him, making the bed springs clunk, and wrap my arms around him. We barely fit in the bed together, and I’m half hanging over the edge, but I don’t care. This is exactly where I want to be, and I’m never going to leave. He curls up and rests his head against my chest. Can he hear how fast my heart is racing?

“Sorry I’m so weird,” he whispers. “Do you still wanna be my boyfriend?”

I close my eyes. God, I wish he wasn’t drunk right now. I wish he meant all this stuff he was saying. I want it so badly it hurts.

I run my fingers through his hair. “Yes. I do.”

“Ok,” he says. “And you’re a fucking hot cowboy.”

He won’t remember this tomorrow, but I smile. “So are you. You’re the yee to my haw.”

He lets out a long breath, *hmm*-ing contentedly and I settle in, stroking his hair and enjoying the moment.

Then he lurches up, leans over the edge of the bed, and pukes his guts up.

10

-Malcolm-

FUCK.

FUCK.

Fuck.

I'm going to invent time travel for the sole purpose of hunting down whoever invented alcohol and murdering them. Because fuck them. Fuck them sideways.

I haven't even opened my eyes yet and the pounding in my head is enough to make me want to cut it off at the neck.

I groan and roll over. Big mistake. My stomach flips and bile rolls up my throat. I try to crawl to the edge of the bed, only to find it's about five times too small, and half topple out of it, catching myself just in time before I hit the floor.

What the fuck? Who shrunk my bed?

"Good morning," says a bright and cheerful voice that I instantly recognize and hate. How can he be so chipper when the world is literally heaving apart.

"No, it isn't," I croak.

I crack one eye open against the loathsome morning sunshine, still half hanging out of the bed, and see an upside down North in baggy sweats and a hoodie, holding a glass of water. Seeing it, I suddenly notice how thirsty I am; my throat feels like I tried to drink the Gobi desert.

Then I realize that no one has shrunk my bed because this isn't my bed. We're not at my place.

"Do you need a hand there?" North asks, walking over to me.

"No, I'm fine," I say automatically and struggle to push myself back onto the bed without emptying my roiling guts onto the brown carpet. Although by the look of it, I doubt it'd make it any dirtier.

North watches me with sympathy clear on his face, and I want to shake my finger at him. Nuh-uh. I don't like that, I don't do being looked after. I'm the one that looks after North, not the other way around. All I need is a drink, some healthy food, and a brisk run outside, then I'll be as good as new.

I spring to my feet with grace and agility. At least that's what happens in my head, but it doesn't exactly go as planned. Halfway to sitting, my stomach rolls, my head pounds, and I end up flopping back down onto the pillow, groaning.

"Oh god. I feel like the underside of a garbage truck."

North comes over to me and holds out the glass. "Here, drink this."

I take it from him with a wobbly hand and tilt my head enough so I can get my lips on the rim.

"Just little sips," North says.

Accepting defeat, I do as he says, taking small amounts of water into my mouth and swallowing. It soothes my throat and tongue, but the water gathers in my belly and sits there like a stone.

"I'm gonna puke," I groan.

North picks up a bowl from the floor by the side of the bed. It's clean but wet inside, like it's been recently washed out. I blink at it, trying to get my thoughts into a logical order. Have I already been sick? Wait, how did we get to North's dorm room? The last thing I remember is being in the bar with the other Green Hawks, and watching North as I pressed my foot into his—

Oh fuck.

I grip the bridge of my nose as the memories come flooding back. Did I really try to give North a foot job under the table? In front of everyone? Jesus fucking Christ. How the hell did I get so carried away?

"How many drinks did I have last night?" I ask. It must have been a lot for me to be such a fucking idiot.

His attempt to hide his smile fails miserably. "Four shots."

"What?" I drop my hand. "That's it?"

Is he serious? It's been a while since I've had anything to drink but fuck me, that's humiliating. I flop my head onto the pillow, making the world tip dangerously. "Fuck. Just kill me now, please."

"It's not that bad," North laughs.

"I tried to jerk you off with my foot in a bar surrounded by our teammates. It is that bad."

"Yeah, that part was a bit . . . interesting."

He laughs again but it's not as light, and it trails off a bit too sharply.

I squint at him. Something's wrong. Even through my monster of a hangover, I know every inch of his face well enough to know. He's distracted, his smile isn't as wide, his eyes track away, avoiding me, and avoiding *something*. Something that's playing on his mind.

"What is it? Did I do something?"

North's smile dims a little more. Shit. I did do something, didn't I? My already rolling stomach tightens, threatening to spill across the bed sheet.

"What happened?" I ask, dreading the answer.

He shakes his head. "Do you remember anything after we left the bar?"

I try but it's foggy through the haze of alcohol. After the bar, we walked somewhere for a while. Here? And I had my face pressed against something warm and soft.

And I was horny. I remember that clearly. Very horny. The sick feeling rises up my throat. I didn't make him do anything weird did I? Something kinky he wasn't comfortable with? But I can't remember any *action*, and when I look down, I'm still dressed in my clothes.

"You walked me home, and . . . you made me get into bed?" I hazard a guess.

He nods.

Yes, he made me get into bed, and I wanted to pull him in and have sex, but he said no.

That makes me flush. Thank fuck one of us was being sensible.

After that I remember talking, something about cowboys and how hot North was, and . . .

I go cold as it comes back to me in a sickening flash. No, I didn't, did I? I told him about my father.

He's still watching me. I didn't do anything bad to him, the thing he's holding back is *pity*. That's somehow even worse.

North knows about my dad and it feels like the bottom has fallen out of the world. Which really doesn't help my stomach. I grab onto the bedsheet on either side of me.

"How much did I tell you?" I ask roughly.

He hesitates. "You told me who gave you your scar, but not why or how," he says. "It didn't feel right to ask."

I close my eyes and wish the mattress would swallow me whole. The fucking scar. I'm never going to have another drink in my life. The

bed dips as he sits and I feel like I'm out in the middle of the sea somewhere, rolling over the waves.

"Is that why you never let me see it? Because you don't want to talk about it?"

I scoff. "I don't let you see it because it's fucking disgusting."

"It's not disgusting. It's just a scar," he says.

I open my eyes again and stare at the ceiling. God, I feel so fucking tired. Tired of hiding. Tired of holding everything back. I don't know if it's the hangover or what, but I feel torn open, defeated, emotionally drained. My eyes water and I don't know why.

"Mal," North says, "the only thing that's disgusting is that your dad would do that to you."

His voice has gone cold. I've never heard it like that before, even back when we first started this and I was being an asshole to him all the time. Even when we were fighting, he never sounded like this. He sounds angry.

Then he sweeps the hair away from my face and I can't help but lean into his touch, letting out a ragged breath.

"If you want to talk about it, I'm here. But no pressure."

To my shock, I find I do want to talk about it. I want him to know. It's like I've had this weight on my shoulders my whole life and now it's finally too heavy for me, and sharing it with North might just make it a bit easier to carry.

I take a deep breath and start talking, staring at the beige wall by the bed. It's easier to get it out if I don't have to look at him, if I don't have to see the look in his eyes, whatever it might be. That might be the straw that breaks me completely.

I don't know where to start, so I just start at the beginning.

"I was just about to turn ten. My mom had promised that I could have my first big birthday party, invite everyone in my class, big bouncy house, all that dumb shit. I'd already picked out the cake I wanted and everything. She was going to do it all herself. This was before my dad hit it big with the real estate stuff, and we didn't have a whole lot of money, so it was a pretty big deal for me. I was so fucking excited." I stop to take another deep breath, feeling winded.

"But then she had to go into the hospital a week before. She'd been sick for a while but we, my father and me, and I suppose her, too, didn't realize how bad it was. She was run-down and tired all the time, but I just thought it was going to be one of those things that you get over." I

throw a quick glance over at North. He's nodding along, probably wondering where this is going. I fix my eyes back on the wall.

"I still thought she was going to get over it and come home and arrange my whole stupid party, and that's all I was thinking about. Until my dad came back from visiting her one night. He told me she wasn't going to be coming home for a while. I asked about my party and he said he didn't have the time or energy to organize it so it was canceled. I cried. I was more upset about that than my mom being in the hospital. I was a selfish, stupid kid, and I don't think I really understood what was happening. I was excited for my birthday party and now I wasn't getting it. So I had a tantrum. My dad absolutely lost his shit. I guess he was stressed from everything going on and he didn't need an asshole kid crying about a party when his wife was sick. I get that now. He snapped, said I was a selfish brat, and when I wouldn't calm down he hit me. Just the regular stuff, with his hand. So I cried more. So he hit me with his belt."

I swallow. The wetness gathering in my eyes up to this point finally overflows and slides down the side of my face. It's fucking stupid and it's only because I feel so ragged and hungover. I want to wipe it away, but I don't want to draw attention to it.

"He got me across the back with the buckle. Split my whole back open. He was fucking stressed so maybe he didn't realize which end he was using. But that sure shut me up. I think I was too shocked to cry. I don't remember any pain, just that it was numb and wet and hot. It bled a lot and I had to be carted off to the hospital so they could stitch me up. I don't know what he told the nurse about what happened, probably lied. But he dropped me off and left me there."

My jaw is so stiff with the strain of holding everything in that I'm speaking through clenched teeth. This next bit is the worst part.

"Afterward, my father picked me up from the hospital. He waited until we were in the car, and then he told me my mom was dead. She died while the nurse was stitching me up. Up until that point, I still didn't realize how bad it was. And then suddenly she was just . . . gone. I never got the chance to see her. I never told her what a great mom she was, and how much I loved her."

The snot is starting to run now, and I sniff and wipe my arm across my face, abandoning the attempt to hide it. I'm such a fucking mess. North is still silent.

“And that was it, my father didn’t say another word about it. We never spoke about what happened, about Mom, or what he did. He never apologized.”

Now that I’m past the worst of it the words are pouring out of me, like I’ve nicked an artery and the blood is just gushing out all over the floor. I’ve explained what happened with my scar, but I can’t stop talking. more things bubble to the surface along with the water dripping from my eyes. It’s like I’ve sprung a leak and I’m not going to stop until I’m empty.

“We were never the same after that. When I was in high school I met this guy. He was older than me, and he was so fucking cool. It seemed like he knew everything and had all the answers. I fell for him hard and just latched on to him. I was convinced that he was going to make my life so much better. I did anything for him, whatever he wanted. I did it. Even when I found out he was married with kids, I would bend over backward to please him, because I needed him to love me so *badly*. Call it daddy issues or whatever. I thought the sun shone out of his ass. But it didn’t matter. He got what he wanted from me and then threw me away. I guess the shine wore off for him. Who wants a clingy kid hanging around anyway? I was absolutely heartbroken. And I decided I was never going to let that happen again, I was never going to give up my power like that. I guess that’s why I act like such a fucking asshole all the time.”

I stop talking, entirely empty.

North’s just staring at me with his mouth open. I’ve never told anyone about all this before, and I wait in silence for him to say something.

Finally, he shakes his head. “Mal, I’m so sorry that happened to you.”

I shrug, wiping my face with my forearm. “Worse shit happens to better people. It’s not like none of it was my fault.”

“Don’t say that.”

I just shrug again. North comes over and sits directly next to me.

“No, I mean it. Don’t say that.” He takes my face in his hands and meets my eyes, holding me there when I try to turn away again. I blink, trying to clear my eyes. I probably look like a fucking disaster. “None of those things were your fault. You were a kid, and they were both fucking adults who treated you badly. Your dad was supposed to look after you, that was his fucking job, and what happened is entirely on

him. And to be honest, that other guy sounds like a fucking sexual predator.” His eyes are fierce, boring into mine. “You’re not fucked, Mal, you just need therapy. And I don’t want you to ever think that you’re not worthy of love.” He gulps. ”Because you are. I love you.”

My mouth opens but no words come out for a moment.

“What?” I say.

“I love you.”

11

-North-

MAL STARES at me in disbelief as if someone declaring their love for him is the most unbelievable thing he's ever heard. But it's true.

There are no words to express how awful I feel for him. I can't blame him for trying to guard his heart after all that. But I'm here now, and I'm not going to break it again. I'm going to scoop it up and cradle it in my hands. I'm going to protect it until it's strong enough to protect itself.

He still isn't saying anything. But I'm not going to take it back. I love him, and he should know it. I don't know what I'm expecting when he finally reacts, but it's not for his face to crumple, for his shoulders to shake, and for the tears to pour out of him.

This time I don't hesitate. I wrap my arms around his wide shoulders and hold him close while he cries silently, the wet tears soaking into my chest through my hoodie. He doesn't make a noise, only gasping a breath now and then, but he keeps his head burrowed into my chest, and I hold him and stroke his hair and kiss his head until his tears slow down and he stops trembling.

Inside, I seethe. If I ever meet his dad . . . I don't even know what I'll do, but it won't be pretty. I've never felt hatred like this before, it's like a fire in my belly. And someone is going to burn for it.

Eventually, I ask, "You ok?"

He lifts his head and clears his throat. "Yeah," he says, sniffing. And I can tell he means it for once. "Sorry, I, uh, made a mess on your hoodie."

"You can buy me a new one," I say.

He huffs out a half-hearted laugh that's wet and ragged. His eyes are puffy and red, his face blotchy and pale, and I love him with my whole heart.

"How's the hangover?"

“Still fucking awful,” he says.

“I think I know what might make you feel better.”

“What?”

It might be weird to offer this now, but I want to make him feel good, and I know one way to do that.

“Dr. Google says that coming can be a great hangover cure.”

He laughs and sniffs. “I’m not sure I believe his credentials. And I might puke on you.”

“Ooh, sexy,” I say, raising my eyebrows. “Wanna give it a go anyway?”

He’s still looking at me with that disbelief in his eyes. I’m going to make him believe it.

I lean in and kiss him carefully at the edge of his mouth and he turns his head into it.

His breath is musty with stale alcohol and spicy pizza, but I couldn’t give less of a fuck. He’s always up and ready before me so I never get to experience his morning breath. It’s such a private, honest thing. Yeah, call me weird, but I guess I’m well and truly smitten.

This is Mal, raw and true. The tang of his breath, the stale sweat on his clothes, the bed hair, it all makes him feel so real, so human, so perfectly imperfect. He’s not a fantasy figure from my forbidden kinky sex dreams anymore. He’s Mal. My Mal. Who sweats, and makes mistakes, and tries to hide it all because he thinks someone else is going to hurt him.

But that person isn’t me, and if anyone tries to hurt him again they’ll have to go through me first.

This time isn’t like the others. It’s sweet and slow.

While I kiss him I trace my hand down his navel and over his crotch, stroking him through his pants.

He’s still wearing the cowboy vest from last night, although the hat is long gone, probably under the bed somewhere.

He’s never let me just explore his body like this before and I want to take my time and touch and taste every single part of him. I work his pants off, careful not to jostle him too much in his delicate state. His cock is filling, but I give it a hand anyway. I stroke it, pausing to rummage in the drawer by my bed and pulling out a half-empty tube of lube. I squeeze a healthy amount out and smooth it up and down his cock, then strip out of my sweatpants and toss them on the floor, still

wearing my tear-stained hoodie. This isn't about being sexy. This is about making him feel loved, about showing him what he means to me.

He starts to struggle to sit up, but I put a hand against his shoulder and push him back down firmly onto the bed.

"I want to take care of you for once," I say.

His warm brown eyes are huge as I climb up and push his legs apart. Then I dip low and suck his dick, running my flat tongue up and down his length while I work myself open with my lubed fingers. I go slowly, swallowing around him and working him up gradually until he's fully hard and leaking salty precum. Once I'm ready, I pull off his cock, leaving a line of saliva glistening on the tip. Careful not to put my weight on him, I swing one leg over, straddling his hips with my knees. I take position over his cock, and then ease down, taking him inside a fraction at a time. I sink down, ease off, sink down again, taking my time, gentle and slow.

He holds tight onto my thighs as I go, like he's afraid he's going to fall off the bed if he lets go.

"You ok?" I ask.

He nods, his eyebrows pushed up together.

Once I'm fully seated I take a moment to adjust, breathing slowly through my nose. The urge to get rough is huge, I want to fuck myself on his cock until I'm rabid, but I'm doing this for him not for me and I need to be gentle.

When I've adjusted, I move, easing off slightly, then back down again, working his dick in slow sweet strokes. After a moment, his hips start to move, too, matching mine, and we rock in rhythm, slow and erotic.

I clench around him, feeling the way it makes his body roll with every thrust.

We fit together so perfectly. I look down at him rocking up into me, and I feel like my heart is going to burst.

"Oh god, Mal, I love you."

The crease between his eyebrows grows. He closes his eyes and it knocks a tear loose. It gets trapped in the corner of his lashes for a moment before it slides down his cheek. I wipe it away with my thumb, then lean down and kiss him. He makes a small, soft noise in his throat.

"You're good. You're so good," I say against his lips.

He shudders, his hands on my thighs gripping tighter, and I keep kissing him as I rock back and forth easing his cock in and out.

We've done a lot of things together, all kinds of crazy kinky sex, explosive fights, he's tormented me, and I've tormented him back. But we've never been this gentle. We've never made love. But that's exactly what this is.

I palm my dick and work myself in time as I roll my hips, the pleasure pooling at the base of my spine. On top like this, I can angle it so every thrust hits just right and I ride his dick like I'm trying to prove a point. And I guess I am, I'm trying to prove what he means to me.

His breath puffs against my cheek as I speed up, chasing the sweet feeling of bliss that lingers so close.

"North," he groans.

"I've got you," I say.

I pull away just enough to see his face. He grunts, his mouth falls open, and his shining eyes burn into me as his hips jump and his body tenses. Then he's filling me with warmth as he gasps and bites down on his lip, never once taking his eyes off me. Like I'm the most important thing in the world. Like he needs me.

I ride him through the orgasm, clenching around him and pumping my own dick. Then I angle my hips, riding that sweet spot until my climax hits. It's not like the other times with him, it isn't a great rolling wave that overwhelms me. It's much calmer, sweeter. A blossoming thing between us. My cum spills over my fingers and onto his belly where his top has ridden up. Then I flop forward and brace myself with one hand on the mattress and kiss him as the bliss clouds around us.

12

-Malcolm-

WE LIE half-naked and entwined, his long bare legs wrapped around mine. I'm pretty sure he's half hanging off the bed, but he doesn't complain, and I don't either.

That was . . . nice. Really nice. Which is a word I've never used to describe sex before. Hot, mind-blowing, feverish, yeah, but never nice.

And I feel weird. Usually after sex, I feel pleasantly empty, like a calm lake. But now I feel full, and the warmth spreads over me and consumes my whole body. It's an odd sensation. It's wholesome.

"Feel better?" North asks.

I do, a lot. My head is clearer and my stomach doesn't feel like it's trying to crawl up my throat. "A little," I grumble.

"Told you."

I roll my eyes. "I know you're smart, you don't have to convince me."

"Oh," he shifts and props himself up on his elbow, his hair an absolute mess. "I forgot to mention, you said something else last night."

His smile is mischievous so at least I know it's not something awful, but I still want to groan. It's something he's going to use to wind me up at every possible opportunity, I have no doubt. I better not have told him about my snow globe collection. Life won't be worth living with him after that.

"You said you wanted to be my boyfriend," North says. He says it lightly, but I can sense the tentative question under it. "Aaand that you wanted me to move in with you."

"I did?"

He nods, watching me carefully.

I mull it over. Not the most embarrassing thing it could have been. "And what did you say?" I ask.

“I said yes, of course. Dude, I just told you I love you. Several times. Of course I want to move in and all that shit.”

My face heats as my mouth fights to do the dumbest, dopiest fucking smile ever. North loves me. I have no fucking clue what to say or think about that, but the way it makes my heart stammer is undeniable.

“And no, I’m not expecting you to say it back. The whole ‘I love you’ thing,” North adds quickly.

I hadn’t even thought of that. I’ve never had to deal with this sort of thing before. How long before you’re supposed to say it back? But this is North, he isn’t going to make it hard for me, I don’t have to worry about it, and that makes the warm glow in my chest grow all the more.

This time I lean in, hovering my lips just in front of his. A reversal of our usual system. It seems like a day for turning things on their heads. He closes the gap. And when we break apart we’re both smiling.

“All right, I’ll be your fucking boyfriend,” I grumble. “And you should move in with me because I’m not staying in this puke-soaked shit hole ever again.”

He rests his head on my chest and I curl my arm around him, cautiously at first, testing the way it feels, and then tight as I lower my face to the top of his head and breathe in. He smells good. He smells like home.

Now that I’ve told him about my past trauma, I feel light, like I could float away, and he’s the only thing holding me down. I want this moment to last forever.

My phone chooses this exact second to buzz sharply on the side table where North must have put it last night.

I ignore it.

It buzzes again, and again, and I growl and remove my nose from North’s hair. Fuck this person whoever it is for making me move.

I grab the phone with one arm, keeping the other wrapped around North. No way am I letting him go now.

I read the messages.

Then I read them again.

My eyes go wide.

“Shit.”

North looks up. “What is it?”

I read the messages again to make sure I didn’t somehow misread them. But no, there it is in black and white.

“He’s coming. Here,” I say numbly.

North frowns up at me. “Who?”

“My father.”

“What?” Emotions flash across his face, confusion, shock, and then settling on anger. “Your dad’s coming here?”

My phone buzzes again and I read the new messages.

Where are you?

Why aren’t you at the house?

“No,” I say. “He’s already here.”

KEPT BY MY TEAMMATE

1

-Malcolm-

"SHIT."

I tumble out of bed and have to pause for a moment on my hands and knees as the world tries to flip end over end, like a stomach-curdling fairground ride.

I groan.

The swell of endorphins from North's slow ride has eased my hangover but I'm far from all right; my body is pissed at me for falling off the wagon, and it isn't going to let me forget it in a hurry.

North sits up, his blond hair sticking out every which way. "What are you doing?"

All he's wearing is his oversized hoodie, and the black jersey material falls to the top of his thighs, which are still smeared with our cum from the slowest fuck I've ever had. I don't think I can even call it a "fuck," what he just did to me. It was so languid and soft and filled with . . . meaning, that I still need to wrap my head around it. I want to savor the feeling. I feel like my world has catastrophically changed, the bedrock of my existence shifting and changing beneath me. He's my boyfriend now. I want to taste the unfamiliar word on my tongue. He's moving into my house for fuck's sake. Officially. I need to process what this means. But I can't, I can't do any of that because all I can think about is the fact that my *father*, the shadow who has hung over me my whole life, who I've managed to avoid for years, is at my house *right now*, waiting for me. And I have no idea why.

"I have to go," I say.

I steady myself on the bed with both hands as I stand, wait for my head to stop spinning, and then grab my boots from where they're set neatly by the end of the bed. North must have put them there last night. I shove them on, wobbling on one leg on the unsteady ground. My limbs don't seem to be cooperating. It's only when I straighten again to an

uncomfortable tightness across my shoulders that I realize I'm still wearing the stupid, too-small cowboy vest, and it takes even more effort to shrug it off.

While I do, North gets up, scoops his sweatpants off the floor, and slides his long legs in.

"Ok, just let me get dressed."

Does he think he's coming with me? The thought of my father having any sort of interaction with North is enough to make me want to be sick again. North is good, and nice—sunshine personified. Everything that's good in my life. I can't let his essence be tainted by my father.

"You stay here," I say.

He looks up at me. "What? Why?"

"Just stay here," I say, grabbing my phone, keys, and wallet, and backing toward the door, holding my hands up like he's a wild animal. "I'll deal with this, and I'll be back later."

North is disbelieving, like I just said I was going to go dance in traffic. "No. Are you kidding? You just told me what he did to you, Mal. I'm not letting you go on your own."

No one has ever wanted to protect me before, and it's a strange feeling that makes my chest squeeze. Is this what it means to have somebody love you? To feel privileged and deathly afraid at the same time?

But I can't let him. My father is unpredictable; I have no idea why he's here or what he'll do. I can't risk anything happening.

I open the door as North shoves his bare feet into a pair of sneakers.

"*No*, you're not coming, North. Stay here and I'll see you later. I'll text you. Ok? Just *stay here*."

"Mal—" He jumps to his feet but I'm already out of the room and closing the door behind me.

I run down the hallway, alone, to face my father.

It's true that I don't want North anywhere near my father, but there's another reason I need to do this alone. One that I don't want to admit to myself. I hate being weak, and no one makes me feel weaker than my father. And if North comes with me, he might see just how scared I am.

***

Bright sunlight makes me squint as I walk across the parking lot. The air is crisp and cool which helps my head, but the clear sky does nothing to block the light, and the sun has decided it hates my retinas. The feeling is entirely mutual.

I scowl as I look around for my Porsche, before I realize it's still at the bar. North walked me back last night didn't he? Shit. I curse and sigh. With the way my head is spinning I'm probably not safe to drive yet anyway.

One call to Uber later, and I'm sitting in the back seat of a stranger's car trying not to retch at the overpowering smell of cheap aftershave, and sweating through my top.

My skin's clammy, my stomach turns like it's on a speed cycle, and my clothes are too tight. Underneath the potent aftershave smell there's something else assaulting my nose. I raise my arm, sniff at my armpit, and grimace. Fuck, I stink of stale beer, body odor, and sex. I should have had a shower at North's before I rushed off. But then, it's never a good idea to keep my father waiting. I'll just have to face him like this and hope he doesn't notice. He's not the most observant of people, he's always too busy being wrapped up in his own self-important bullshit. Narcissists like him never put too much effort into what other people have going on.

Maybe it's the hangover, maybe it's my nerves. All I know is, it'll be a miracle if I can get through this without throwing up. Again.

The driver is chatting away, but I'm too preoccupied to pay any attention. That doesn't stop him though, he's apparently happy to keep on going with no interaction from me. I wish he'd shut the fuck up. My head's spinning enough as it is.

Finally, after what feels like torturous hours and fleeting seconds at the same time, the Uber pulls up, and the first thing I see is a sleek black Mercedes sitting in the driveway in front of my house. My stomach rolls again and I swallow bile. He's here. My father is inside.

For the entirety of my time at Langley, he hasn't visited or contacted me once. Has he somehow found out about what I've been doing in my spare time? He knows I'm gay, but that's it. If he knew about . . . all of the rest—the toys, the clubs, the *session room*.

I curl my hands into fists to stop the tremor.

"Erm, we're here," the driver says, peering at me over his shoulder. "Are you getting out, dude, or what?"

I nod. My limbs suddenly don't want to move, and I have to drag myself out of the back seat. As soon as the door is shut, the car speeds off, leaving me with no route of escape, standing on the hard driveway in front of my own house. Well, in front of my father's house. I don't own it. He does. He owns everything in my life, including me, and I was stupid to ever think that he'd just leave me to it.

I move up the driveway, putting one numb foot in front of the other, past the shiny black car, my reflection warped in its paintwork. Suddenly everything in me craves for North to be at my side. But no, that would be just as bad. Would he think differently of me if he saw how much of a coward I really am? What if my father did something to him too? Better that North stays well out of this.

Somehow I make it to the front door.

With my heart pounding in my ears, I push it open and step inside.

2

-Malcolm-

I STOP inside the hallway and listen. Over the thudding in my head, I can just make out some noises coming from the kitchen—someone moving around, the clink of crockery. Well, at least he hasn't discovered my little addition to the house. Believe it or not, my father didn't buy this property with the session room already installed. And I doubt he'd approve of his money being used in such a way. He doesn't like anything that flies outside the lines, and I'm pretty certain a fuck room specifically for kinky and depraved sex acts with other guys is way outside the lines.

Thank fuck my card bills are private or he'd have a lot to say.

Moving like a zombie, I follow the noises.

My father is standing with his back to me at the kitchen counter on the far side of the room, using the coffee machine I bought with his money. He shifts, pushes a button, and sets the steamer off with a sharp hiss that makes steam billow around his shoulders. The back of his suit jacket is smooth and neatly creased in all the right places; tastefully expensive.

I hesitate, stuck in limbo between getting his attention and escaping back into the hallway, then out the front door. Running as hard as my feet want me to. Do I say something, or just wait for him to turn and see me?

Before I can decide, his back straightens, his head rising like he's sensed my presence.

He turns.

He looks exactly the same as the last time I saw him, years ago. Grey eyes, and a clean-shaven, wide jaw. Dark hair, now greying at the edges, neatly clipped into a conservative cut.

He's not quite my height, but he's a big guy, and he makes up for it in width. I didn't get my strong build from my mom. His pristine Italian

suit hugs the stretch of his shoulders and neatly conceals the softness around his middle that increases every time I see him.

He looks me up and down, then says, “You look like shit.”

Guess he has noticed my bedraggled appearance. I try to remember how to breathe.

He takes a sip of his coffee and I see he’s using North’s mug. It has a happy cartoon sandwich on it above the letters *LGBLT*. North thought it was hilarious when we saw it at the mall, so I bought it for him. My fingers twitch at my side with the need to take it from him.

He leans back casually on the worktop and puts the mug down beside him. “So? Where have you been?” He raises his eyebrows. “I got here this morning to an empty house, no car in the driveway, no sign of you.”

My throat is almost too dry to speak. His hand rests an inch from a chip in the countertop, where North and I got carried away one evening. My eyes lock onto it. All I can think is, *if he knew. If he knew.*

“I’m waiting,” he says, and my eyes snap back up to him.

“Why are you here?” I ask.

He frowns. “What, I can’t visit my son?” he says.

“You haven’t visited me the entire time I’ve been here,” I say.

His face darkens suddenly. “And whose fault is that? How am I supposed to visit when you move all the way to the other side of the fucking country?” he snaps, his voice full of venom. Then he shrugs, completely calm again, and takes another sip of coffee. His emotions can whiplash like that, calm to angry and back again in a split second. It made growing up with him a fucking rollercoaster—me, always trying to second-guess what his reaction would be to every tiny thing, avoiding anything I thought might set him off, and him, throwing me off and reacting to the most innocuous thing anyway. There was no amount of damage control that could give me an easy life, and he saw a reason to be angry in everything.

If I was doing well at school, I wasn’t pulling my weight at home.

If I was doing well in sports, I wasn’t working hard enough at school.

If I just stayed out of his way, I was an ungrateful brat who didn’t appreciate everything he’d given me.

It was like trying to tiptoe, blindfolded, through a minefield.

And right now he’s watching me with that hair-trigger look. “I’m in town on business, thought I’d drop by to make sure I’m not wasting my

money on you coming here. It looks like you've been partying instead of studying."

It's just my luck that the one night I go out, he shows up the next day.

"I went out with the football team," I say. "It was a one-off."

He narrows his eyes. "You're on the football team?"

There is the smallest hint of approval in his voice. Apparently that wins me a point in his favor. It shouldn't be a surprise to him though, I've been playing since I was a child. Football is one thing we have in common. That, and anger-management issues.

"Yeah."

He smirks. "Any hot cheerleaders?"

Apparently, knowing I'm gay isn't enough, he has to test it every couple of years just to make sure. Like if he drops enough hints or talks about girls enough I'll suddenly realize I actually do prefer tits. He wants a "normal" son, which is kinda funny considering how much effort he put into fucking me up.

"I wouldn't know," I say.

Ok that was the wrong thing to say. Moment of bonding over. He frowns, sets North's mug down again, and straightens away from the counter. I brace myself for the incoming storm.

"You think you're funny?" he snaps. "I've come all this way to see you, and off you go being a little shit the second I walk through the door. Do you know how much I'm paying for you to attend this college on the other side of the country?"

I stare straight ahead and don't reply, because he doesn't actually want me to. He isn't asking a question, he's demonstrating his control.

"Of course you don't know, because you don't *work* for your money. I do. You've had an easy ride your whole fucking life. I want to see *results* for the investment I'm putting in here. I'm not paying for you to have an extended holiday, so if you think I'm gonna let you spend all of my hard-earned money fucking around with—"

There's a *slam* from the hallway as the front door bangs open, cutting him off mid-rant, and we both turn toward the noise.

North—panting, red faced, and wind swept—appears in the kitchen doorway. His forehead is shiny with sweat, and there's a glint in his wild blue eyes that tells me he's ready to fight.

My heart stops. I told him to stay put, I *told* him to *stay put*. And now North is here, and so is my father. Together. In the same room. The two

halves of my life that I never wanted to meet.

Horror and relief war inside me. Just seeing North makes it easier to breathe again. But I want to shout at him, scream at him, to get the fuck out of here.

Our eyes meet. I open my mouth, say nothing, and then spin back to my father, waiting for his reaction.

There's a split second of surprise on his face. He gives North a once-over, takes in his all-American good looks, handsome face, and fit body, weighs in his effortless air of confidence, and decides this is someone he wants to impress. North has that effect on people.

The change is instant, the storm clouds vanish and he transforms before my eyes; one moment he's about to tear me a new one, and the next he becomes the charming and hardworking businessman everyone knows and loves. Patrick Blackwood, CEO of Blackwood Estates, and proud father. Slightly confused at this sweaty young man that's just burst into his kitchen, but turning his business smile up to full wattage nonetheless.

I'm turning between them on either side of me like I'm watching a horrifying tennis match. If I didn't sweat through my top on the ride here, I definitely have now.

"Hi there," my father says. Charming, friendly.

North just stares back at him, his shoulders rising and falling with each panting breath.

I try to catch his eye and give him a pleading look, shaking my head minutely.

Don't say anything, I attempt to send him telepathically. Don't do anything. Please.

"Are you going to introduce us, Malcolm?" my father asks.

North finally meets my eye. He takes my look in, and his shoulders sag slightly.

"Malcolm?" my father prompts.

I take a deep breath. "Uh, North," I say, trying to sound normal, "this is . . . my father. Patrick Blackwood." I break eye contact, hoping and praying that North got the message, and turn back to my father. "Father, this is North Nolan. We're . . . on the football team together."

Without warning my father strides forward and brings his hand up. I flinch instinctively at the movement before I realize he's going to shake hands with North. I pray North didn't notice.

“I was under the impression my son didn’t know how to make friends,” my father says, coming to a stop in front of him with his hand out. North just stands there with his own hands at his sides. He looks furious. He looks like he’s ready to fight, right here, right now, on the kitchen floor.

A beat passes, then North glances at me. I stare back, giving a tiny shake of my head again.

Just play it cool.

My father has made it clear in the past what he thinks of anything that flies outside of his lines, and me fucking my teammate in his house is definitely outside the lines.

North seems to understand my message. He looks back at my father, and slowly, as if it’s laden with weights and a physical effort, raises his hand. Then he takes my father’s and pumps it once, knuckles white. I can see a line standing out on the side of his neck, and his nostrils are flared.

“So, you’re Malcolm’s football buddy?” my father asks, completely oblivious.

“Yeah,” North growls.

I’ve never heard North growl before. It’s obvious he’s doing his best to keep calm, but he’s still radiating anger like a heat lamp. Somehow my father isn’t picking up on it, or he just doesn’t care enough to notice. And for once I’m really fucking grateful.

My father drops North’s hand and turns back to me,

“So, Malcolm’s been holding out on me. Has he got a girlfriend yet?” he asks North while looking at me. His tone is jovial. It makes my stomach turn.

“I don’t want a girlfriend,” I say.

He laughs like I told a joke.

“You know what,” he says to North. “Malcolm here has never had a girlfriend. I don’t think he has the people skills required.” He laughs again. “Maybe you can help him out, hey?” He looks back at me. “Maybe North here can help you out. I’m sure he has no problem with the ladies.” He slaps North on the shoulder, and North twitches, a muscle jumping in his jaw. “Am I right?”

I’m certain North’s about to pop him in the face, but at that moment my father’s phone goes off and he takes his hand off North’s shoulder and checks the screen.

“I need to go. I’m staying at the Four Seasons while I’m in town, but I’ll be back later.” He shoots me a look that says “*we’re not done,”* then smiles widely at North. “Pleasure to meet you, North.”

Then he’s shouting into the phone as he marches out of the kitchen, and the front door slams hard enough to rattle the hinges.

There’s a moment of silence as we both stare out of the door, then I slump into one of the chairs at the breakfast bar and take a deep breath. I feel like my strings have been cut. I drop my face into my hands and close my eyes, trying to dispel the cloud of dread clinging to my skin. I don’t want North to see.

“What the fuck was that?” North says.

“That was my father,” I say into my hands.

“Are you all right?”

I keep my eyes closed. That could have gone so fucking wrong.

“I told you to wait at your dorm,” I say.

There’s a warm pressure on my back, and the smell of North surrounds me. Despite the riot of emotions trying to claw their way out of me, the familiar smell of him instantly helps calm me down, and I take an even deeper breath to get as much of it as I can.

“I know. I’m sorry. But I couldn’t. You’re my boyfriend now. Officially. And my boyfriend doesn’t face shit like this on his own.”

Right. I’m his boyfriend. He’s my boyfriend. The first I’ve ever had. God I hate how warm that makes me feel, and the way my throat tightens at his words. I wish I could react like a normal person and just be happy.

I open my eyes and sit up, and North shifts, still keeping contact. I want to talk it all over with him, but I’m already exhausted.

“He doesn’t know about us and what we do,” I say, “and I have no idea what he’d do if he found out. So we just have to play it cool until he leaves again. Okay?”

“How long is he staying in town?”

I shake my head. “I don’t know.”

“All right. I can do that,” North says, swiveling my stool around to face him. “Although I’d love to knock him the fuck out.”

My mouth twitches up at that. Oh how I’d love to see it.

“Are you ok?” he asks again.

“Yeah, it’s just a shock. He’s . . . unpredictable.”

He wraps his arms around me, and some of the tension melts out of my shoulders. “Ok, I’ll play it cool, I promise. Although I don’t like it.”

“Thanks. I’m sorry he’s such an asshole.”

“Well, he’s gone for now, so let’s just relax. And no hanky-panky until he leaves. I’m assuming he has a key?”

“Yeah, this is his house. And who says hanky-panky? What are you, my fucking grandmother?”

“What’s wrong with hanky-panky? You’d rather I say ‘fucking’? ‘Raw dawgging’? ‘Pounding my ass’?”

“I’d rather you shut the fuck up,” I say, fighting a small smile at his uncanny ability to make me feel light when I’m heavy.

He laughs. “You’re lucky I love you, because otherwise I might take offense at being spoken to like that.”

The casual way he says it—*I love you*—feels so alien to me that it hits me right in the chest, as heavy as the first time he said it a few hours ago. To my utter shock and horror my eyes start to well up and I have to blink quickly and turn away.

“Shit,” I mutter.

“What?”

“Nothing, I’m just . . . not used to hearing that.”

He frowns. “Hearing what? That I love you?”

Another punch to the gut, and my eyes water more, threatening to spill over. It’s like he’s found the switch inside me to turn on the sprinklers. “Fuck. Stop saying that.”

“You want me to stop telling you that I, North Nolan, love you, Malcolm Blackwood?”

“Shut up,” I say wetly, trying to shove him.

He jumps away from me, dancing out of reach and cackling like an old woman. “No! I love you!”

“For fuck’s sake.” That does it. There’s no stopping them now. I cover my face with my arm and storm off to the bathroom to find some tissues, grinning that stupid fucking dopey grin that he keeps making me do, while North’s laugh echoes from the kitchen.

***

We play it cool all weekend, but my father doesn’t reappear. He’s like a black cloud hanging over me, promising a storm that refuses to break. Even with North and his apparent superpower to make me feel good, I’m constantly on edge.

On Saturday night North stays at his dorm, and by Sunday morning I'm wound so tight I feel like I'm going to explode. I give in and he stays over Sunday night, but we don't get up to any "hanky-panky," and when Monday rolls around North is wound just as tight as me. The new week brings stability with routine though, and we fall back into our normal pattern—up early, breakfast, run, drills, college.

We have practice after classes and I'm looking forward to burning some tension off, although there's something else that would be a *lot* more effective at that. Something I will not think about because I'll drive myself crazy. Still, football will help.

Seeing North trotting out in front of me with those tight pants and shoulder pads is torture. He looks so fucking good—long and lean and so, so fuckable. Images of everything I'm going to do to him when we're in the clear dance through my mind, sending blood rushing to unhelpful places.

Shit, I really need this football practice.

I stretch out and loosen up, trying to shake three days of oppressive tension of waiting for my father to reappear. Maybe he isn't going to come back. Maybe he's gone home and just didn't bother to tell me.

It's a tiny spark of hope, but I mean, it's something he'd do. Just fuck off without saying anything. Maybe he's gone, and we can get back to our lives—

I come out of the stretch, look up, and freeze.

Because there—leaning casually against a railing in the stands like he belongs there, despite sticking out like a sore thumb in his smart suit—is my father. He has his phone to his ear, but his eyes are already set on me, just waiting for me to see him.

My heart stutters, and he raises an eyebrow that communicates his message as loudly as if he'd shouted it:

Go on, impress me.

3

-North-

TWENTY MINUTES into practice, Mal fumbles the ball for the third time. It's only then that I realize something is wrong, or at least more wrong than it has been for the past three days. He curses loudly and rolls his shoulders, as if he's trying to shrug a weight off, then glances over his shoulder at the stands. He's got the same spooked look that he had in the kitchen with his dad. With a feeling of looming dread, I stop where I am and follow his gaze.

Patrick Blackwood is standing in the bleachers.

When he didn't reappear all weekend I thought—hoped—he might have just gone. But no, the asshole is right there in the stands, and he's staring at Malcolm.

This is only the second time I've ever seen him, but his face looks *different* from before. In the kitchen he was all smiles and I wouldn't have been able to guess what kind of guy he was underneath if I didn't already know. But now the smiles are gone and he's watching Mal with an intensity that makes my skin crawl. He's taking in every single move, every breath. Like a bug under a microscope. Like a cat crouched and watching a bird.

Now Mal's behavior makes sense, and anger bubbles up inside me. Just his father's presence is enough to completely throw Mal off his game. He's intruded into our lives and the effect he has on Mal is infuriating. Mal doesn't deserve this. This guy is just an overgrown bully, and I can't stand bullies.

As I watch, Patrick shifts and his gaze jumps to me—probably because I've stopped in the middle of the field to stare at him—and his expression transforms back into a pleasant smile. He looks for all the world like a friendly dad, just here to watch his son playing football. But he doesn't fool me. I saw the predator hidden under that smile.

I hold his eyes and I don't smile back.

He might have been able to do whatever he wanted to Mal in the past. But I'm here now. If he wants to get to Mal he's going to have to go through me first.

The friendly smile dims and a question enters his eyes as I continue to glare at him.

The sharp peep of a whistle brings me back to the field and I realize someone's been calling my name.

"Earth to Nolan. For Christ's sake, what are you doing?" Coach shouts as I turn back. "And Blackwood, if you screw up one more time I swear to god I'm benching you for the rest of the season. Get your heads in the game, people. Come on."

I shoot Patrick one last look, then jog over to Mal, putting my body between him and his father, and clap my hands on his shoulders.

"Come on, Mal, you got this," I murmur. "Just ignore him."

His deep brown eyes burn into mine.

"I can't."

***

By the time we file into the locker room, I'm boiling with rage. Practice went from bad to worse, and Mal got a full dressing down from Coach in front of everyone.

It's bad enough that his father has been hanging over him all weekend, but then he shows up while Mal is taking part in one of the very few enjoyments he lets himself have and ruins the whole thing. And there was nothing I could do except carry on playing and watching as Mal failed again and again.

Why is Patrick here? To test him? To vet whether he's good enough? Whether it's worth his money? Or does he just want Mal to know that he can drop in, any place any time, and that Mal can never get away from him?

Ever since Saturday morning and that goddamn text, Mal has been twitchy, distracted, and lacking his usual confidence. He's edgier than I've seen him in a long time. And I hate it so fucking much.

"Are you all right?" I ask as I shrug out of my gear.

It says something about how much he's progressed that he doesn't just lie. Instead he shrugs, one shoulder rising higher than the other,

and then shakes his head. From him, that's as much as an admission. He's not ok. At all.

I'm burning to *do* something about it, but what? I can't confront his dad, Mal has begged me not to. *Begged*.

Mal doesn't fucking beg.

I throw my pads into the locker harder than I need to, and they *clang* against the back.

"Let's just go away for a few days," I say. "Until he leaves. My grades are good and I'm not behind on anything. We don't have any games. No one will care if we miss a few days."

"Wouldn't it be a bit weird if we both disappeared for a few days?" he says.

"Yeah, but who cares? We could just lie and come up with an excuse. I could say I had to go home for some reason and, I dunno, you could say you were ill."

It's sounding like a pretty great idea to me, but he just shakes his head. "And then what? It'd only make things worse. He'd get pissed off that I'm avoiding him." He throws his own clothes into the locker, keeping his head bowed. "I just need to play it safe until he goes."

"What if he doesn't leave?" I say.

He shakes his head again. "He will. He has no reason to stay here, he has too much going on. I just need to give him what he wants, and he'll be happy."

"What does he even want?"

He doesn't look at me, but I can see the tension in his shoulders and the way he moves. "To be in control."

And doesn't that just tell you everything you need to know about Mal's relationship with his dad. About all of Mal's hang ups and inability to give up control. Because he's been forced to give it up his whole life. If I was a therapist I'd be rubbing my hands together.

"I don't like this, just doing nothing," I say. "I don't like the way he's affecting you."

Or the way he's affecting me. I'm not used to being this angry. It's entirely foreign to me. Yeah, of course I get angry sometimes, everyone does, but not to this degree or for this long. I can *feel* the anger, like there's a flaming rock in my chest that keeps getting bigger until it pushes against my ribs. And it's getting harder and harder to contain it every time I see Mal with that look on his face, the way he holds his shoulders, the way he flinches and jerks when he moves. It makes me

want to smash up the world. And I don't know how much longer I can last.

"There's nothing we can do," Mal says quietly.

We shower and dress in silence, Mal being careful to keep covered up as much as possible, hiding his scar.

We leave the locker room and round the corner, heading down the long corridor that leads back out to the field. It's the end of the day now, so we're heading to the parking lot for Mal's Porsche, which he retrieved from the bar yesterday—and almost walk straight into Patrick Blackwood.

Mal freezes, his eyes going wide.

Patrick is leaning on the wall with one elbow while he talks into his phone. He's always on that fucking phone. He holds a finger up to us, telling us to wait while he finishes the call. The hot stone in my chest grows and creaks against my ribs, threatening to burst out of me like an alien.

I want to keep walking but Mal has obediently stopped and I can't leave him behind. So we just stand here in silence while his dad chats. It doesn't even seem like the asshole is talking about anything important. From what I can make out he's riding someone for the fact some subs had ham instead of beef in them.

I tighten my grip on the bag strap on my shoulder. *Just play it cool. Play it cool.*

Finally he finishes and tucks the phone back into his pocket, and regards Mal with an amused frown like he doesn't understand something.

"I thought you said you could play football?" he says.

"He can," I say.

Patrick glances at me without moving his head, his eyes sliding to the side.

"I need to talk to my son," he says, apparently dismissing me, although he's staring at Mal again.

I plant my feet wider, falling into a casual stance. "Go on then."

He spares me an irritated look. He isn't even bothering with his friendly smiles now. I guess I've firmly put myself in the "enemy" category.

"In private."

I look around and shrug. "This is a public hallway."

He dismisses me with a breath through his nose that could be irritation or amusement, then sets his attention back on Mal.

"What was that on the field?"

Mal blinks and his throat moves as he struggles to find something to say.

"You were putting him off," I say, trying not to raise my voice.

"I was just standing there," he says. "People watching you play is kind of the point."

I open my mouth but Mal talks over me quickly.

"I was just having a rough day," he says.

"Well, it seems like your grades are adequate. I had a chat with your professors. Now I just need to talk to your coach and see what he has to say about you."

"Is that any of your damn business?" I say.

He laughs dryly, although there's a dark twist to it and he looks irritated. "Yes. Actually. He's my son and I'm paying for this whole thing. But what I don't know is how any of this is *your* damn business, son."

This corridor feels too small for both of us. His dad narrows his eyes at me, a calculating look on his face. Then he looks at Mal, his head tilted slightly, and Mal pales at whatever private message he sees there. I step forward, standing slightly in front of Mal, hands clenched. Mal grabs my arm, tight enough to hurt.

"North," he hisses.

I resist him for a breathless moment, on the verge of surging forward, and then glance back at him.

His brown eyes are wide. "I'll meet you outside. All right?"

The muscles in my jaw twitch. Shit. Right now I'm probably doing more harm for him than good. If I stay here any longer I'm going to pop his father in the mouth and get blood all over that fancy suit of his. And even though I want to so, so badly, it'd only hurt Mal in the long run. And he's been hurt enough for a whole lifetime.

Mal lets go of me and I shoot one last scowl at Patrick, clench my fists so hard my fingernails dig into the palms of my hands, and barge past him.

"Something wrong with your buddy?" Patrick Blackwood says.

"He's fine," Mal says.

I keep on heading away. Then I'm out of there and striding out of the building.

***

I make it all the way to the parking lot before I can't hold it in anymore. It feels like someone's unscrewed my head, filled me up with boiling water, and then screwed it back on again. Patrick Blackwood's face swims in front of my vision—that careless expression, the smugness, the casual cruelty. It's reserved only for Malcolm, but I saw it. On the field and in the hallway. And the only thing that will make me feel better now is tearing his fucking head off.

How dare he.

How fucking *dare* he.

I throw my bag onto the ground by the Porsche and kick it as hard as I can. It half wraps around my foot and only slides a few feet away on the concrete, which just makes me more mad.

"God-fucking-damn!"

Mal appears behind me, and I round on him.

"I can't fucking play it cool, Mal. I just can't."

He looks behind him and unlocks the Porsche. "All right, just get in."

I throw the passenger side door open and climb in, slamming it hard behind me.

"Why the fuck is he even here?"

Does this man have any idea just how much he's affected his son? How much damage he's caused him? And does he even fucking care?

"He just wants to check up on his investments," Mal says bitterly, climbing into the driver's seat and closing the door carefully. I watch him and wonder how the tables have turned so massively. He's moving with deliberate movements, contained, slow. And I'm boiling over.

"Fuck!" I shout. "I'm just so fucking mad, I can't . . ." I trail off into an incomprehensible growl.

"Don't get so upset over him. He'll be gone soon, and we won't have to see him for another five years."

I should acknowledge the fact that Mal just said "we" and "five years." I know there's something in there that should make me giddy, but I'm just too mad to process it. I file it away to think about later.

"I know but . . . Argh." I pound on the dashboard with my fist.

"Please don't damage my car," Mal says.

I round on him. "How the fuck can you be so cool?"

“I’m not, I just have a lot of practice holding this shit in. It’s a survival thing I guess.”

“You’re never this calm with me.”

“Because I’m safe with you.”

Oh.

That makes me cool off enough to actually take him in. He’s looking at the dashboard where my fist hit it, his eyes heavy, his shoulders slumped. Defeated. Have I just made everything ten times worse for him?

“Fuck, I’m sorry, Mal.” I scrub my face and then tug my hair back. “I haven’t ruined everything have I? I was trying to keep cool, I really was. I’m just . . . I’ve never been this wound up before and I don’t know what to do.” Frustrated tears gather in my eyes out of nowhere and I blink them away. I’ve fucked up. I’ve let him down. I might have made everything worse.

He watches me for a moment, and then he gestures.

“Come here.”

“What?”

He grabs my arm and pulls me onto his lap so I’m straddling him, on my knees, face to face. “Let me help you calm down,” he says, then unzips me and slides his hands down the back of my pants, cupping my ass.

The prospect of getting busy in Mal’s car should excite me like a horny teenager, but all I can think about is the way Mal’s strong shoulders hunch under his dad’s gaze. The careful deadness to his usually wild eyes. And I fucking hate it so much.

“I’m sorry,” I say again. “I hate what this is doing to you. Does he have any idea how much he affects you? Or does he just not fucking care?”

“Stop talking. You’re just making yourself more mad.”

He slides his fingers down between my cheeks, two fingers pressed to the skin just above my asshole.

I grunt. “Fuck, I want to make him pay for what he did to you.”

Malcolm pulls one hand out of my pants, reaches across and opens the glove compartment, and withdraws a sachet of lube. He tears the top off with his teeth.

“I know.”

“I can’t just—ah.” The next thing I feel is his fingers pressing warm circles around my hole, slippery with the lube. It feels good, and it takes

the edge off just enough for me to register that this is actually really hot.

"Is that better?" he asks.

I grunt. "A bit."

He slides one finger inside me slowly and I grunt again. He pulls it in and out, sliding against the ring of muscle all the way up to his knuckle and back. I let out a deep breath.

Then, with one finger still inside, he adds another, working it in with slow movements at the base of the first.

I close my eyes, and the stretch takes my mind off anything but his fingers, working into me until he draws them out and then pushes them all the way inside in one slick motion. My back stiffens and I drop my forehead to his shoulder.

His other hand tangles in my hair and pulls—just enough pain to feel good—and with his fingers pumping into me I start to melt, the tension easing and slipping away until I'm blank.

He keeps going, taking me apart and holding me together with his fingers in my ass and in my hair.

When the last wisp of anger leaks away, he stops pumping his fingers and just leaves them full length inside me, filling me comfortably. I push back on them.

"Feel better?"

I breathe out against his shoulder and nod. "Yeah."

"Good."

That simple word, said in his usual deep voice, lights a new kind of fire inside me. But before I can do anything about it, his phone goes off, vibrating against my leg. I stiffen as he twists around me to get it, pulling his fingers out of me as he does but keeping his hand in my pants.

"Shit."

The loss feels huge, I want them back inside, but there's only one person I can think of who'd have any reason to text Mal right now.

4

-Malcolm-

I KEEP North's body pressed against mine and one hand cupping his ass while I check my phone. For moral support. His warmth feels so good pressed against me, and the round globe of his ass cheek sits perfectly in my hand, slick with the lube.

I brace myself as I open the message and see my father's name on the screen, but instead of the accusations and threats I'm expecting, it's just two short lines of text:

Father: My business is done. Won't be back to the house.

Father: Get a fucking girlfriend.

A wave of relief washes through me as the meaning of his message sinks in. He's leaving. *Thank fuck*, he's leaving.

Whatever Coach told him must have been good enough. I've never liked the man so much. Maybe I'll have to make an anonymous donation.

I scan the words again, not believing I'd be this lucky. I thought we'd fucked up for sure. That my father would've caught on about North and I. But no, maybe he really is that oblivious. For once, I'm grateful that he's such a huge narcissist.

I sag against the chair and North senses my reaction.

"Is it him again? What's he say?" He leans away from me and looks like he's ready to fight again, that fierce glow lighting his blue eyes.

I show him the screen and his eyes flick over it before he deflates as well, looking relieved but also disappointed. Is it because he didn't get a chance to size off against my father? The thought makes me smile. My golden retriever has teeth and, for once, he wanted to use them. I guess that makes me feel kinda special—that he wanted to go to bat for me—but my father is not a man you want to face off against,

and not just because he's big. It could only have ended badly. This way is for the best; he's happy that he's still in charge, he's made his point, and hopefully I won't have to see him again for another five years.

North sits back on his haunches in my lap. I can see the thoughts flickering through his head, processing the last few days and coming to terms with it all now that it's over.

"I can't believe your dad wanted me to help you get a girlfriend," he says finally and snorts.

I'm already feeling a thousand times better.

"Yeah. Little does he know I've already got one."

"Hey." North punches my arm and I almost drop the phone. "Anyway, can you imagine? 'Hey ladies. Check out my friend. He's a ten, but he'll leave you chained up in his basement.'"

I give his ass a squeeze then pull my hand out of his pants, grab the packet of sanitary wipes from the glove compartment and clean my fingers. "It worked on you didn't it?"

"Pfft. Yeah but I'm a special kind of weird."

"You're the perfect kind of weird."

North gives me a look that's touched and gooey. I guess I don't say nice things to him enough. I'm going to have to work on that.

Which reminds me. Now seems like as good a time as any, while I'm riding on the high of freedom. I clear my throat and reach into the glove compartment again, North shifting on my lap, and pull out a flat blue box with golden lettering. It's been sitting in there for a while now.

I hesitate, and then pass it to him without saying anything, and he accepts it.

"What's this?" he asks.

"Something I should have given to you ages ago," I say.

He narrows his eyes, suspicion warring with excitement on his face. "What is it?"

"Just open it, idiot," I say, smiling.

He eases the lid off and fishes out a silver key on a metal loop. I got it cut back when I was training him to pass that test, but I never gave it to him. Guess I was embarrassed at being overeager. Even now I feel stupidly nervous, considering he's already agreed to move in with me anyway. But it feels big, far bigger than the small key in his hand.

"A key?" he asks, but he's giving me that look again that makes me feel warm in too many places. It crawls up the back of my neck,

threatening to take over my whole face with burning warmth, and I try to play it cool.

"It's for the front door. If you want one to the back you'll have to earn it," I say and he laughs. "I'll hire a company to pack and move your stuff tomorrow."

"I can do it myself," he says. "It's hardly a lot. It'll only be a few boxes."

"So?"

You could say I'm not the most emotionally outgoing person—and bears shit in the woods—because sometimes the words feel too big to fit out of my throat, and my body feels so stiff with the need to touch him that I can't move. So instead, I buy him clothes, and medicine, and someone to move all his shit for him, and hope he gets the message.

He rolls his eyes but doesn't fight, then lifts the other item out of the box. It's a short metal chain, silver, with a hoop at one end and a bar at the other. He looks confused. I clear my throat.

"It's a discreet collar that you can wear every day. If you want."

"Oh," he says. Pink crawls up his neck and tinges his cheeks and ears. "Can you put it on me?" he asks.

He leans back, giving me space, and I reach over and loop it around his neck and slip the bar through the hoop, my fingers brushing the skin of his throat. It sits snugly around the base of his neck, and . . . it looks really fucking good. The possessiveness I feel every second of every day rises up inside me like a tidal wave.

"I want you to know that you belong to me, constantly. Every second of every day, you're mine." I can't stop the growl of my words. The thought of anyone else touching him stokes a fire inside me. And the thought of North looking at anyone else the way he looks at me—giving them attention, letting his blue eyes graze over their body—it's enough to make my breath catch. I don't want that. I never want that. Ever.

North touches the chain with his fingers. "Thank you. I love it," he says earnestly.

Fuck. All of the blood in my body is rushing toward my dick. After the last few days I need to release all of my tension, right fucking now. I need to hold him down, own him, push him to the limit, until he makes those wild noises that are as addicting as a drug. I need to fuck this beautiful man.

And judging by the way he's looking at me—his eyes hungry, his face flushed, the strong line of his jaw clenched—he's feeling the same.

"Let's get home. Now."

He jumps back into the passenger seat and I'm tearing away before he's even got his seatbelt on.

I want to get my fingers back inside him, to tease him and build him up until we get there, but I need two hands to drive the Porsche.

Fuck it, I'm getting an automatic ASAP.

***

By the time I pull up outside the house, my dick is throbbing and the bulge in North's pants is huge. He's as ready to go as I am and my mouth waters at the prospect.

My seatbelt is off, and I'm on top of him in the passenger seat, reaching blindly for the door handle. We scramble from the car, groping and stumbling in the direction of the house, lost in our heady rush. I can't keep my mouth off him for one second.

I kick the door open, and we almost fall over the door step, a tangle of limbs and breathless need. The side table by the front door topples over onto its side, sending everything flying, and I throw my keys down into the mess without a care. Then North's back is to the wall, and I'm pressed against him. My hands find their way under his shirt and shove it upward, exposing the smooth golden skin of his torso. I lick down it, circle his navel and then come back up. I find one nipple and bite down. He groans and arches against me, pushing the hard lump of his erection against my side.

I go to unzip his pants, find they're already loose, and plunge my hand inside, grasping his hard, hot cock. He makes another noise, moving against me mindlessly. I tangle my hand in his hair and pull his head back, mouthing my way up to his throat while I handle his dick roughly.

We get lost there for a moment, breathing against each other's mouths until I manage to break away, breathing heavily. I'm just about ready to come, but I've waited days for this, and I'm going to make it fucking last.

"On your knees," I growl.

He drops like I've kicked his legs out from under him, his knees hitting the tiled floor with a thud.

"Get your dick out."

He fumbles with his fly, frantic to do as he's told, gets his stiff cock out, and then drops it, leaving it standing stiff with his hands by his sides. He won't even hold himself unless I tell him to. And fuck me, he's perfect. Absolutely perfect.

I take a shuddering breath as my willpower vanishes.

I fuck him right there on the hallway floor. His asshole is still lubed enough to make it smooth, but with just enough drag to set my teeth on edge in the best way.

While I slam into him, I twist my hand in his hair, the other working his cock, and suck red circles onto his neck, across his back, and between his shoulder blades. Wild noises spill from his mouth, and I drink them in like they're vital. Like they're my oxygen.

He comes first, spilling across my hand and the cold tiles, and I'm not far behind. Biting down on his shoulder, I plunge my fingers into his mouth, making him taste himself, and he sucks at them greedily, and his asshole clenches around me until I'm grunting my orgasm against his shoulder blade.

Fuck, I've missed this.

When the last tremors of my climax stop, I roll off him and lie on my back, panting. His pants are halfway up the stairs—I don't even remember throwing them—and his top is bunched up around his arms, exposing the full length of his godlike body.

"Fuck me," he groans.

"I already did," I breathe.

He laughs and rolls over, leaving a puddle of cum on the floor. "Well I don't know about you, but I feel much better."

I roll my head, my cheek pressed to the cold tiles. He looks hot as hell, pink faced and ravished, hair a mess and eyes heavy with satisfaction. His spent cock rests against his thigh, and his limbs are loose with relief.

"We're not done yet," I say. We have a lot to make up for, and I'm only just getting started.

His eyes widen and his full lips part soundlessly.

"Go get your cage," I say.

5

-North-

THE STRAPS around my wrists and ankles dig in, holding me open and exposed, and I shift in the chair as much as I can. Which isn't a hell of a lot.

Mal stands back and takes in his handiwork, his ravenous eyes probing every part of me. I'm sitting slumped in a wide, deep chair, with my hands tied behind my head to the headrest, and my legs spread and secured to the arms with leather straps at my ankles and just below my knees, offering Mal a perfect view of my ass, caged cock, and balls. My asshole is still wet and leaking his cum.

"Comfortable?" Mal asks.

I shift again, feeling both humiliated, and hopelessly aroused.

"Yeah," I say. "I might take a nap actually."

He smirks and then flicks my throbbing caged dick, and I flinch. We've both just blown a load but after a whole weekend with zero sexual contact I'm already primed for round two, and my poor cock is trying its darndest to get hard.

"Always with the smart comebacks," Mal says with his usual arrogant ease. The nervous, edgy Mal from the last two days is gone, and I already can't quite believe he was ever here. He's firmly back in his comfort zone—i.e., torturing me. "We've got a lot to get through. I still haven't repaid you for making me dress up in that fucking ridiculous cowboy costume."

Oh yeah. With all the drama I almost forgot about the costume social.

"I know you secretly enjoyed it," I say. "Don't lie."

He huffs an unamused breath and then disappears behind me, reappearing a moment later with the red ball gag. I gulp audibly at the sight of it.

Ah my old friend, how I've missed you.

“You’re being very chatty today. But we have a lot to do, and I can’t have you distracting me.”

I whimper as he pushes the ball between my lips and fastens the straps tightly around the back of my head. Fuck, that feels good.

“Got anything else to say?” he asks and cocks his ear toward me. He loves it when I make muffled noises through the gag, so I grunt pathetically and try not to enjoy it too much, and he grins darkly. “I thought so.”

He disappears behind me again, his voice moving as he walks around the room. “There’s still quite a few toys I haven’t had a chance to try out on you yet.”

How can that be possible? You could stock a small kink shop with the equipment he’s used on me. Although you’d probably need to bleach it first.

He moves around, gathering an array of toys on the table next to me, and my eyes widen. Where the hell does he get all of these from? Does he have some kind of dildo Tardis? They range from small to huge, different colors, textures and shapes, but I don’t have time to properly take them in because the next moment everything goes black. I make a muffled noise as he fastens what feels like a leather blindfold in place. And I’m suddenly completely helpless, blind, and unable to speak. Completely at his mercy.

“I hope you got a good look, because you’re not going to know what’s coming.” His lips brush the hair by my ear.

I shift again, moving my hips, painfully aroused in my cage. With every shift, his cum oozes out of my hole and dribbles down between my cheeks.

“You’re already nice and wet for me,” Mal growls, sliding a finger up my crack and then dipping inside me. He pushes in deep and curls his finger, finding my sweet spot as if by instinct, and strokes against it slowly. I shift and pull against the restraints.

Then the finger is gone and replaced by something cold and hard. It eases inside me, icy against my hot flesh, making me draw in a sharp breath through my nose.

“I wanted to start smaller, but you’re already stretched out,” he murmurs into my ear.

He pumps it in and out a few times before he withdraws it. Then something else takes its place. This time it’s not cold, but it feels bigger. Still, it slides inside me with no stretch.

Mal *hmms*.

It might not be wide, but this one's long, and it keeps going, easing inside me inch by inch until I'm bucking my hips and clenching my hands.

The next one is bigger, and it stretches me as he pushes it in. The ring of muscle pops over lumps on its shaft, and as he pulls it in and out my body jerks with each ridge, twanging me like a guitar string.

"You like that one?" he asks.

I nod shakily.

He goes through so many different toys I lose count. All I'm aware of is one thing after another sliding into my ass, pressing up against me, massaging that spot that makes my toes curl, and stars flash across the darkness. He's methodical, and I moan and groan around the gag and try to push back, try to get any kind of friction on my trapped dick and my aching body, try to take more.

Then one of them, buried deep inside me, starts to vibrate. I yelp. The thrumming is a vibration traveling through my core, shooting along the length of my body like an electric shock, and grounding in my aching cock. I can feel warmth leaking from the cage as cum drips down my thigh, and I start to beg desperately through the gag.

I need to come so badly, but I can't even ask him, I can't beg him to let me. I'm trapped here while he plays with me, writhing, squirming, and sweating. My eyes water and my breath shakes. The world beyond the blindfold has reduced to a mirage of sensations, all of them fucking me.

Finally, Mal speaks. "Had enough?"

I nod and whimper, trying to communicate how desperate I am. *God yes, please, I've had enough. Please let me come.*

"You look so good like this, North. I can't stop yet."

I groan and roll my head back.

"You have to take one more thing, and then I'll let you."

I hear a fumble of fabric, and then something warm is pressing at my entrance. It's Mal. And he pushes the head of his cock inside me with ease. I'm so stretched from all the toys that he's in and buried deep in one single thrust, hitting me right where it counts.

And fuck it feels better than all the toys combined.

He fucks me into the chair while I cry around the gag. Behind the blindfold, my eyes are rolling up into my head.

Please, I try to say. Please. Oh god, please.

He pauses in his thrusts just long enough to release the cage and in seconds I'm coming, waves of bliss rocking my body as my ass clenches around his cock, my cum splashing up my own chest as I convulse.

My mind blanks out and I'm dimly aware of the warmth of his cum as it fills me for the second time. His breath stutters as he gasps.

"Fuck. Oh fuck."

Same.

I grunt back.

His body is rigid against mine until he melts against me.

While he's still inside me, he loosens the straps holding my arms and legs in place, and they flop down, tingling and numb. Then he pulls out carefully, wraps his arms around me, lifts me out of the chair, and carries me. I phase in and out. Where are we going? If I reach up and take the blindfold off I'll be able to see, but I feel so limp and satisfied I can't move. After a while he lays me down on something soft. Then he slides the blindfold off and takes the gag out, and I blink in the light.

We're on his bed. Not the spare bed. *His* bed. In his bedroom. The nightstand, with the trophy and photo of his mom on it and his glasses that I've never seen him wear, neatly folded, and the piles of sci-fi books.

I'm here. He's let me in.

I stare around in wonder as he settles down next to me.

He slides his fingers inside my sloppy hole, plugging his cum inside me, keeping it where it belongs. I'm so warm and comfortably full. Content. My limbs are sore and my body aches deliciously. For the first time in three days, I feel totally at peace.

I smile and snuggle into his side, my clammy skin pressing against the smooth material of his top. He doesn't bother putting his pants back on, and I can feel the soft warmth of his spent cock against my thigh, and it feels . . . homey, just like his fingers inside me.

I kiss the side of his neck, and he turns his head toward me to meet my lips and slips his tongue inside my mouth when I open for him. We kiss long and deep and lazy. I trail my fingers through his thick hair, enjoying the feel of it, and when we break the kiss, my lips swollen and wet, Mal keeps his eyes closed, enjoying the touch.

And just like that—wrapped around him, his fingers inside me, my fingers in his hair—I fall asleep.

6

-Malcolm-

I WAKE up with North naked and wrapped around me. I don't move, but it's not because I'm scared—I stopped being scared of North's affection some time ago—it's because I'm happy. Yeah, weird. But I want to stay here like this for as long as possible. Even though I'm half-naked myself and the patches of dry cum and lube feel tight on my skin. Even though a small part of my brain is telling me I need to get up and have a shower, go for a run, eat. Not to waste a second of the day. I tell it to take a hike and pull North in tighter.

After a while he stirs and his eyes open in sleepy cracks. He rolls his head, looks at me, and smiles gently.

"Morning."

"Hi," I say.

I've woken up with him so many times now, but it still feels like the first time. Only now, the anxiety that used to gnaw at me has turned into something more like excitement; a pleasant tingle of nerves that I'm here, and so is he.

I lean down and shyly kiss him, almost an experiment, just to check I can. This time, just like every other time, nothing bad happens. His lips are soft and warm, still half-asleep, and he hums a waft of morning breath.

We fell asleep without eating anything or washing up, and after the workout I put him through last night it doesn't seem fair to make him get up and go for a run. So we start the morning slowly, washing each other in the en suite shower.

After that it's breakfast in the sunroom, enjoying the thin rays of light coming through the glass that warm the room despite the wintry sky outside. I add a little cinnamon to his grits, a recipe I found online, and he hums appreciatively as he shovels it into his mouth with his usual gusto. Everything feels so *right*. So comfortable.

Once we've eaten, we get ready to head to college. North has classes first thing, and I always go in with him, even though I don't have anything until later. Once we're dressed he goes to grab his stuff from the spare room, and a moment later he calls through the open doorway.

"Mal? What's this?"

I go through. He's standing next to the desk where he has his study sessions. Between the stacks of books is a slimline matte-black laptop, sleek and new. He gestures to it.

"This isn't my laptop."

"I got you a new one. Yours was glitchy as fuck," I say.

He blinks at me, opens his mouth and then closes it again before he says, "My old one was fine, where is it?"

"In the drawer. And it isn't fine. It takes ten minutes just to turn on, and the last time you used it you lost five hours of your work."

He doesn't have an argument for that. Instead he inspects the new one, like it might explode if he touches it. Although his old one is much more likely to do that.

"How much was it? It looks expensive."

I raise an eyebrow. "Doesn't matter."

"Yes it does. Mal, you can't just keep spending money on me—"

I catch him with a surprise kiss and he makes a startled noise against my lips. I tug his hair slightly and he melts before I pull away enough to say,

"Shut up. I can spend my money on whatever I want. And you still have your old one if you really want to use that outdated lump," I say. "Anyway, it's not my money, it's my father's. He made that very clear."

Knowing what I know, most of it probably isn't even my father's money. I squash the thought quickly.

North considers it. I've got a point and he knows it.

"Ok. If it's that asshole's money, maybe I don't mind using it up."

"Which is why you should be using that card I gave you. How many times do I have to tell you?"

He looks like he's going to protest again, but then he stops, tilts his head, and a slow smile stretches across his face. "Ok."

I narrow my eyes at him. "What? What's that face for?"

"Nothing. You'll see." He picks up the new laptop and slides it into his bag.

My frown deepens. "I don't like surprises."

"You'll like this one," he says, with a sly grin. "Trust me."

He heads downstairs before I can ask again. I don't like not knowing, but I know I can trust him. The cowboy costume swims back into my mind, like a ghost. Okay, no, scratch that, I can't trust him. But I guess I'm just going to have to wait and see, and endure whatever torture he surely has planned.

Still, I'm not happy about it, so I need to make sure our dynamic is in equilibrium.

North is waiting by the front door, and before we leave I push him up against the wall.

"Fine, you can keep your secret, but . . ." I pull the neckline of his top to one side. The metal-chain collar I bought him sits at the base of his throat, snug against his skin, marking him as mine. He kept it on all night. It looks good, and it feels right, but that doesn't mean I can't add my own marks too. The more the better. And his perfect skin looks too good marred with my marks, like my signature across his skin.

North makes a noise in his throat as I mouth the side of his neck, tracing my tongue along the length of his throat, tasting each rise and fall and the stubble he didn't bother to shave this morning, and then suck his flesh into my mouth and work it between my teeth. He holds perfectly still, breathing heavily, only his pulse jumping beneath my lips.

I pull off to check my work, and satisfied with the red blotchy hickey, I trace my tongue over to the other side of his neck and bite him there too.

This time he moans and moves his hips, rubbing his stiffening cock against me. I let him, until he's worked himself up enough. Then I pull off and step away from him, and he groans. I take in the marks, his rumpled clothes, his blown-out eyes, and the healthy bulge in his pants. He looks suitably fucked. In other words, he looks perfect.

"That's better," I say. "Right then, let's go."

His face is absolutely priceless as I open the door and step out into the insipid morning light.

7

-North-

THAT DIABOLICAL asshole. What kind of twisted guy gives you a wonderful lazy morning and then gets you all fired up only to leave you hanging. The kind of twisted guy I'm in love with apparently.

He looks very happy with himself as he drives us to college, while I sit in the passenger seat glaring at him and trying to get my boner to go down.

"You're a dick, you know that?" I huff.

He just looks over at me with that crooked smile that's all smug and sexy and infuriating as hell. God damn him. I grumble all the rest of the way.

At college, the first class goes by as normal, the only difference being the semi I'm sporting the whole time. I usually wear the cage during college, which stays on until the end of the day, so I work hard and earn my release. The buildup of tension is as erotic as it is torturous, but damn, it works. The way I bend over backward to achieve so I can get my rocks off in the evening is heroic.

But he didn't put the cage on me this morning, and my dick seems to be enjoying its freedom, and the semi Mal cursed me with doesn't fade. After fidgeting through lunch like I'm wearing a jockstrap full of fire ants, Mal takes pity on me and takes me to the equipment closet, our usual sordid fuck hideaway.

I'm like Pavlov's dog, as soon as I step into the closet my dick—which has been at half-mast all day—rises to full attention, and he hasn't even touched me yet. The door closes behind us, and without wasting a single second, he hustles me over to the bench, pushes me down, and tears off my pants. My cock springs up, with barely enough time for the cool air to hit it before he wraps his lips around it.

I slap my hand over my mouth, trying to quiet the noises that spill out of me, as he gulps me down and rolls my balls in his hand, blowing

me like his sanity depends on it, like he wants to devour me. It's all I can do not to shout loud enough for the whole campus to hear.

"Fu-uck," I gasp, as he traces down my crack with his other hand and circles a finger around my asshole, kneading the muscles that are still aching from last night.

It feels so good, I'm already on the verge of coming, and then he angles his eyes up at me and looks at me through his eyelashes and—

"Oh, shit!" I grip the bench and come embarrassingly quickly. He fills his cheeks, as I shoot into his mouth, sucking every last drop out of me until I'm a shuddering wreck.

He stands and flips me over on the bench. I roll limply, and the next thing I know, his hands are pressing between my ass cheeks, spreading them apart, and I feel the warm softness of his lips on me.

"Oh *fuck*," I gasp as he laps at my hole, and then works his tongue inside, hot and wet. His breath puffs against the sensitive skin of my crack as he eases me open with hard thrusts of his tongue, then licks around my rim, alternating between the two until I'm pushing back against him, and my dick, trapped against the hard wood of the bench, starts to fill again.

Once I'm open enough, he locks his lips to my hole. Warmth pools inside me, and I realize he's kept my cum in his mouth, and is now squeezing it into my own asshole.

"Shit, Mal!" I shout, and then have to clap my hand over my mouth again because it's so surprisingly and unbelievably hot that I can't keep quiet at the sensation. To be filled with my own cum, that he sucked from me himself. *Fuck*.

Have I said that I love this guy yet? Because fuck me, I do. So much.

His mouth leaves my ass, there's a rustle of clothes, the bench creaks as he positions himself, and a moment later the head of his cock nudges between my cheeks. I bite down on my hand.

He pushes inside me, using my cum as lube and sending an ooze of it dribbling down my crack. I'm stretched from his tongue and still a little loose from the night before, but it's tight enough to make me hiss and roll my body as the amazing stretch sends flares of pleasure through me. He grips my hips so tightly his fingers must be leaving bruises, as he rocks into me, building his pace to a steady rhythm as each thrust curves into my body. He speeds up, going harder and

harder until he's fucking me into the bench, and I'm resting my forehead on my clenched fists and biting down on my arm.

"Do you like that, Nolan? Like it when I fuck you in the ass so hard you can't breathe?"

I gasp and nod jerkily as my eyes water and my breath hitches. God it feels so good when he takes me apart.

"Like it when I fuck you with your own cum?" His voice is a breathy snarl.

I open my mouth to say something, probably begging for him to fuck me even harder, but all that comes out is a strangled and needy whine, so I just nod again.

He slams into me, hard, and my body jerks as I tip over the edge once again. I come with a strangled gasp, screwing my eyes shut as it spreads over the bench and my stomach. My muscles clench and spasm, and I lie limp as he slams into me, my body jerking with each thrust of his powerful hips. Small noises and half-gasped breaths punch out of me.

Finally he goes rigid and his cum mixes with my own inside me.

He pulls out carefully, and then before I can move, I feel the cold metal of a butt plug pushing between my cheeks and slipping into place. His weight leans against my back, pinning me to the bench. Although it's not as if I could move right now anyway. His lips find my neck and I lean into it.

"I want my cum inside you for the rest of the day," he hisses in my ear as he works it inside me and bites on the back of my neck. "I want you sitting in class, surrounded by everyone, with my collar around your neck and my cum in your ass."

I bite down on my lip and nod. He's going to kill me one of these days. Is it possible to die of dehydration from sweating and coming so much? Because fuck me, the things he does to me. And it's going to be the best death ever.

We sort ourselves out and slip out of the closet. I follow him back to the main campus like a well-trained dog, plugged and full of his cum, still buzzing from the high.

My stomach grumbles audibly and Mal raises his eyebrow. Then he reaches into his bag and pulls out a packet of snacks that are nestled next to the three EpiPens he carries in there. I swear he has them stashed in every pocket, every room in his house, and in various

locations around the college, like a squirrel, only instead of nuts it's a life-saving medicine. Or even better, the Easter bunny.

He tosses the packet to me—roasted BBQ corn, yum—and I catch them, tip a load into my mouth and crunch on them happily, while I think. Then I lean in and elbow him in the side.

"Come with me to a study group later?" I ask.

"A study group? Aren't our studying sessions enough for you?"

"More than enough." I drop my voice. "But I thought it might be nice to try somewhere I'm not, you know, naked and chained up."

He levels a devious look at me. "You like it when I strip you off and chain you up." I have to clear my throat as a piece of corn threatens to choke me, and he smirks. "But sure, I'll come if you want. Don't expect me to contribute anything though."

We reach the lecture hall, and he holds the door open for me with one hand. I nod and smile innocently, palming another load of corn.

"Cool."

He'll be contributing all right. But that'll be a bridge we cross when we get to it.

We take our seats and he settles in next to me, slouching with his arm thrown over the back of the chair, like an arrogant king on his throne. I want to thread my arm under his and lean into him, but of course I don't. It'd be an obvious show of un-bro-ly affection in public. We're still not an official item.

That thought stops me. I want to do it, so why shouldn't I? After everything that's happened with us, why am I still holding back? Mal has made so much progress recently, so why can't I? Doesn't that make me kind of a hypocrite?

Suddenly I feel sick. Sick of hiding. Sick of pretending. Mal's dad was a wake-up call if ever there was one, and having to keep my distance for three whole days has been hell. I don't want to do that again, ever. I want as much Mal as I can get, as often as I can get it. Damn it, I want to kiss him in public. He's my boyfriend, but what does that actually mean if we can't do anything about it unless we're hiding away in his house, or in the closet, or in his car?

All because I'm worried about what random people will think of me.

But no, it's not just random people, it's my team, my friends, my family. Their opinion has been the most important thing to me for most of my life.

But if they're the kind of people that will think any less of me because of my relationship with Mal, why do I care what they think? If they're that kind of person, their opinion doesn't count, and they aren't my loved ones.

And I've found something more important now.

I look over at Mal again, his warm, dark eyes set on the professor at the front of the room, and something settles in my belly.

I'm ready for the truth.

8

-North-

THE LOCKER room is heaving with the familiar tang of young men everywhere—body odor, stale sweat, body spray, and cheese. The scent of my people.

I peel my clothes off slowly and change into my gear as the noise and smell of my teammates swells up around me.

I gulp, trying to slow my racing pulse. This is fine, these are my guys. Everyone of them has had my back in the past, and something as trivial as who I sleep with isn't going to change that. Right? Not all of them are one hundred percent straight anyway.

But what if they *do* have an issue with it? Mal isn't just some guy, he's one of us. Is that crossing some kind of line?

Or what if I tell them and they *pretend* they don't have an issue, but secretly they do?

I close my eyes and put both my hands on the front of my locker. Stop overthinking and just do it.

Mal isn't here yet, his last class is on the other side of campus so it takes a little longer to get here. I don't know if that will make it easier or not, but I feel like I should do this on my own. Everyone already knows Mal isn't straight, and he doesn't care what they think of him anyway. The only reason he hasn't told anyone yet is because he doesn't give enough fucks to make an "official announcement"—and because of me, of course. And I don't want to put him on the spot like that, even if he doesn't care. This is all me, and it's time I man up and tell everyone I'm fucking a dude.

Someone slaps me on the back, and I jump and swallow a yelp as my soul leaves my body.

"Yo, Alaska, what's up?" Josh says. "You look like you've got the world on your shoulders, bro."

"Oh, hey," I say.

“I need to talk to you,” he says, then looks around. “Where’s Malcolm at? I swear that dude’s your big scary shadow.”

Josh seems like a good place to start. “I guess he’s running late,” I say, trying to sound casual. “But I need to talk to you too.”

Ok. This is it. I’m going to tell him. I take a deep breath. I can feel my face going red, and he looks at me with concern.

“Josh, I . . . uh.” I hesitate. How do I actually say it? Maybe I should have pre-planned a script.

He frowns, genuinely concerned now. “Are you ok, North?”

“Yeah, I . . .”

Shit, my chest is pounding and I need to just *say it* before I chicken out.

“I’m going out with Mal,” I say in a sudden rush. His frowning face opens up with what looks like surprise, and I cringe inwardly and keep on talking. “I mean, me and Mal, we’re together. Like, as an item. Romantically. We’ve been together for a while and I thought I should probably, like, let you guys know, just so it’s not, you know, a shock or anything. We’ve been sneaking around but I don’t want to do that anymore.”

“Oh,” he says.

That’s it. Oh. What does “oh” mean?

He’s been frozen this whole time, eyebrows almost disappearing under his hairline, but now he moves, glances around awkwardly like he can’t meet my eyes, like he’s trying to figure out how to say something, and all I can think is fuck, have I made a mistake?

Finally he speaks. “Erm. Yeah, we . . . uh, kinda knew that already.”

I blink. “What?”

Out of all the possible answers, that isn’t one I’m expecting. Then his words register fully and I say, “Wait, who’s ‘we?’”

He smiles. It’s apologetic and slightly awkward. Sheepish. Again, not what I was expecting. “The Team? Sorry, I don’t want to steal your big ‘coming out’ thunder. But we already know.” His smile is chagrined, like he’s making a confession. “Come on, dude, you were hardly even sneaking. Malcolm gives you those dark smoldering eyes and then you both scurry off to the showers together? It doesn’t take a genius to figure out what’s going on.”

My mouth falls open.

Josh gives me a sheepish shrug. “Even Randy figured out something was going on.”

“He did?” I ask dumbly.

Randy, who I wasn’t aware could even hear us, pipes up from the other side of the room. “Yeah, you guys really don’t have a concept of what subtle means, do ya?”

I’m lost for words, and my head whips round as Ethan leans around the side of the lockers, his shirt bunched up on his forearms near his elbows, pausing in the act of stripping off.

“Oh, are we finally talking about North and Malcolm?” Ethan says. “Thank god. It’s been so hard trying not to say anything.”

I stare at them as they carry on getting changed like nothing’s happened. None of them seem concerned in the slightest.

“You all know?” I say. It comes out as more of a squeak. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

“You seemed like you were having fun sneaking around,” Josh says. “We didn’t want to ruin it.”

Every one of them nods and murmurs in agreement. Except Brad, who walks out of the shower with a towel around his waist and a confused look on his face. He looks around. “Know what? What are we talking about?”

“North and Mal are banging,” Josh offers.

“What?” Brad turns to me, even more confused. “You guys are banging? I didn’t know that.”

Josh looks incredulous. “Do you live under a fucking rock? They’ve been so obvious, to the point of being, like, painful.”

“Yeah, man,” Ethan adds. “It’s old news. Where’ve you been?”

Brad looks at me, all hurt and betrayed. “How come everyone else knew but me, Alaska? That’s not fair.”

Ok, this is getting more and more surreal by the second. I’ve gone from anxious to just plain bewildered.

“Sorry, bro,” I say. “If it helps, I didn’t know everyone knew either.”

“I’m always the last one to know everything,” Brad grumbles, making his way to his locker.

Josh cuffs him around the head as he goes past. “Shut up you idiot, North is trying to have a big moment of truth.”

That’s it. I slump down on the bench and cover my face with my hands. I’ve dreaded the team finding out, and they’ve already known this whole damn time. The rug’s been pulled out from under my feet, and I feel like a massive fucking idiot, but I’m also so relieved my legs feel weak. I can’t help a slightly hysterical laugh.

Josh drops his voice. “That’s kinda what I wanted to talk to you about. If I didn’t already know, you two going at it in his car in the parking lot would have been a massive giveaway.”

I whip my head up.

“You saw that?”

“Yeah, sorry, bro. I wasn’t perving or anything. You left your shoes on the bench and I was just going to give them to you, but I saw that and just . . . backed away slowly. Just a heads up, you might want to keep it a bit more private. I’m pretty sure doing that on campus is against the rules.”

“Shit.”

Oh god, now the blush is burning me with a vengeance. This has gone from bewildering to excruciatingly embarrassing in a split second.

Josh slaps his hand on my shoulder. “Don’t sweat it, bro. Look, we don’t care what kinda freaky shit you get up to in the bedroom. Or the car. It’s none of our business.”

“As long as you two are having a good time that’s all that matters, right?” Ethan says. “He makes you happy?”

I nod, my throat feeling tight.

“Then that’s the most important thing, bro.”

“Thanks, guys,” I say

“I don’t know why you didn’t just tell us. You know we’d be cool with it.”

“I know. I was just worried you guys would think differently of me.”

“Different how? You’re a pussy magnet. Makes sense you’d be a dick magnet too.” He shrugs. “Just, be a bit more careful about where you do it next time, ok? I love you man, but some images are hard to forget.”

“Especially if you jerk off to them,” Randy calls.

Jason balls his jock strap and throws it across the room in a perfect arc that smacks directly into Randy’s face. “Jerk off to that, douche canoe.”

Randy screams and trips over the bench. God I love these guys.

“And if anyone gives you shit, they’ll have all of us to deal with. We got your back, Alaska.”

The door to the locker room opens and Mal appears with his bag over his shoulder and a scowl on his face. He stops, scans the room, then his eyes zero in on me.

“What’s going on?” he says, as he moves to stand between me and the rest of the guys, shoulders squared and glaring. My black knight. The guys take a step back.

“It’s alright, Mal, we’re just talking. Apparently everyone already knows about us,” I say.

“And we’re all cool with it, dude, no problem at all,” Josh says quickly, raising his hands slightly to ward off Mal’s glare.

Mal deflates slightly. “Oh.”

“Oh?” I echo.

That’s all he has to say?

He dumps his bag on the bench next to me. “Well, yeah, we were kind of obvious.”

Are me and Brad the only oblivious idiots here?

With Mal’s appearance, the council disperses and everything goes back to normal again. Josh hangs around and slaps Mal on the shoulder. “You’re scary as shit, dude, but you be good to him, ok?” he says.

After a beat Mal actually smiles. And all is right with the world.

I laugh.

***

After practice we head to the small room off the library where the study group is being held. Before we go in, I pause, one hand on the door.

“So, you know I said this was a study group?” I say.

“Yes,” Mal says.

“It’s not exactly that.”

He narrows his eyes. “Then what is it exactly?”

“It’s a group. But instead of studying we just talk about stuff.”

Silence.

“What stuff?”

“Just, stuff. Stuff that we want to talk about . . .”

“A social group?”

I purse my lips. “Kinda.”

Ten seconds later we’re sitting on plastic chairs that are arranged in a circle in the middle of the room, and Mal is glaring at me.

“Hello, everyone. Welcome to this month’s well-being meeting,” Professor Kane says. He’s sitting forward in his chair, speaking in a calm voice that someone might use if they were talking to a class of kindergarteners.

This might not have been my best idea.

When I saw Professor Kane pinning up the flier for the monthly well-being club after business class, the first thing I thought of was Mal. If there’s one person that needs some damn well-being, it’s him. But there was no way he’d come if I told him what the group was actually for, so I told him a little tiny lie instead. And now I feel awful.

Mal sits next to me with his arms crossed and a glare that could melt lead. He’s going to absolutely kill me for this.

Professor Kane goes on. “I’m happy to see some new faces today. Can you introduce yourselves to the group?” He smiles and nods in our direction.

I smile sheepishly and wave at the others in the circle. “Hi, I’m North.”

“Hi, North,” the professor says brightly, even though I take his class twice a week. The rest of the group give a chorus of hi’s and then the professor looks at Mal expectantly. Mal doesn’t say anything. After a moment of silence the professor prompts, “And this is?”

Malcolm looks like a crowbar couldn’t pry his jaw open. There’s a long, drawn-out silence.

Professor Kane clears his throat awkwardly. I nudge Mal with my knee as surreptitiously as I can, and finally he replies through gritted teeth.

“Malcolm.”

The professor’s cheerful smile returns, with a hint of relief. “Hi, Malcolm.”

9

-North-

“ARE YOU ready for your surprise?” I ask.

Mal stands in the doorway of his bedroom, summoned by my call after waiting patiently in the other room while I got ready. He crosses his arms and leans his hip against the wall, looking both unimpressed and suspicious at the big robe I’m wearing. Boy is he mad at me for pulling that well-being shit. After growling his name out, he spent the entire time in stony silence, alternating the focus of his glare between me, the professor, and the far wall. Professor Kane was smart enough not to call on him to speak again.

Afterward, I took a quick detour into town on my bike while Mal simmered on his own, and now I’m showered and ready to make it up to him. Big time.

But even Mal’s sour mood can’t put a damper on my elation. Ever since his dad left, there’s been a kind of magic haze over everything. Everything feels so right and great and perfect. Against all odds everything has worked out. We’re together, officially, and now that the team knows it, it’s only a matter of time before everyone knows it. I’m sure I’ll get some sort of negative reaction from some people, and while that thought makes my stomach twist, I’m not as agitated as I thought I’d be. Mostly there’s just relief that I don’t have to try to hide it anymore. I’m so happy and in love with this big grouchy hunk.

“This better be fucking good,” he grumbles. “And if it’s another cowboy hat I’m returning you.”

I grin, spinning the tie of the bathrobe in lazy circles. “It’s too late, you’ve already put your dick in me. No returns.”

He scans me, probably trying to figure out where this is going, as his lips quirk up at the edge. He’s pissed, but he’ll forgive me. He always forgives me.

I reveal myself slowly, untying the dressing gown and letting it fall to the floor, feeling for all the world like a dramatic housewife. A buff, manly housewife.

Mal stiffens visibly, his eyes going wide as he takes in my outfit. Well, I don't think you can actually call something made almost entirely of leather strips an "outfit."

The leather harness goes around my neck—just above the discreet chain collar he gave me—around my shoulders, under my arms, and across my chest. Another harness sits across my hips, leather strips connected to more straps banding my upper thighs. The black leather and metal feels so good against my skin; it's snug and stiff, unbending and constraining. It feels like I'm already bound.

His eyes rake over me before being drawn down to my crotch and the underwear I'm wearing. They're lace, red and sheer, covering me while also being entirely revealing at the same time. I shift my hips, enjoying his reaction, and his eyes track the movement.

I got some funny looks earlier when I went into the store with my LCU hoodie pulled up—looks I'm getting used to when it comes to high-end and designer places. It's like they can smell the poor on me. But I had a secret weapon. One flash of Mal's golden card and it was all smiles and "how can we help you, sir's."

I got horny trying it on. The feel of it against my skin, the tight unyielding leather, and the thought of Mal seeing me like this. The anticipation was almost as erotic as the main event.

And the thought of spending Patrick Asshole Blackwood's money on obscenely expensive lingerie for his son to fuck me in gave me a spiteful thrill. It feels like a massive "fuck you" to him, even though he doesn't know about it. Poetic justice.

"Fuck," Mal breathes.

"What do you think?" I ask.

Instead of answering, he stalks over to me and grabs the back of my head with both hands. Our mouths clash so hard it hurts, and then he's plunging his tongue into me, kissing me with all the ferocious energy he puts into everything. His hands grip my hair tight, like he's worried I'll slip through his fingers, and I kiss him back with just as much force, flattening myself against him.

Without taking his mouth off mine, he pushes me roughly, leading me with the kiss, until I'm up against something hard. The hands tangled in my hair tug hard, jerking my head to the side and tearing the

kiss apart. I gasp for air. He licks down my jaw and throat before latching onto the side of my neck. His other hand wanders across my body, tugging on the straps of the body harness, groping my cock through the lace as he makes noises of appreciation.

"I told you you'd like it," I gasp through numb lips.

He plunges his fingers into my mouth. "Shut the fuck up," he rumbles against me, "and suck."

Fuck me, yes sir. I suck on his fingers, trying to swallow them down as far as I can, and he plunges them deeper. It feels good but, god, I want more. I want his cock. Fuck I *need* his damn cock choking me right now. I try to slide downward but he tightens his grip and pins me in place.

"You're not going anywhere until I say you can," he says, still biting the tender flesh of my neck. I'm going to have the mother of all hickeys tomorrow. It's going to be impossible to hide, and if the guys see it they're going to know exactly who put it there and how. The thought is horrific, and excruciatingly arousing.

He lets go of my hair and tugs at the underwear. He doesn't take it off, though, just slips it low on my hips to release my cock and balls, and it digs deliciously into the creases of my thighs. He palms my dick, and I groan around his fingers as he brings his mouth to my ear.

"Oh, I'm going to have so much fun with you."

My pulse kicks up a notch at the promise in his voice.

"In the session room," he breathes. "Now."

***

There are only two laps I've ever wanted to sit in—mall Santa's, and Mal's. And they're both very different circumstances. For one, I usually don't have a boner when I sit on mall Santa's lap, and second, I don't have a metal bar strapped to my ankles holding my legs apart. But in both circumstances I'm still trying to convince him to give me what I want.

"Fuck, please."

I writhe in Mal's lap. We're sitting in what I call the "horny boy" chair—the one he occupies when he makes me get myself off for his viewing pleasure. I'm sitting sideways on his lap with my arms folded behind me and tied behind my back, wrists to elbows. They're attached to the

harness strap around my neck with a length of rope, so that if I pull down or squirm too hard I choke myself.

My legs are held open with a spreader bar, my red underwear snapped down just below my balls, and Mal strokes my cock languidly while he sucks on my nipples. They're red and sore, and every suck, every stroke of his tongue, every bite of his teeth expertly timed with a stroke on my dick, sends a flash of painful pleasure through me that has me jerking and choking myself.

"You're body is so fucking perfect," Mal says as he circles one of my pink, swollen nipples with his tongue, and I squirm, thrusting my hips and cock up into his fist.

"Mal," I beg. I don't know what I'm begging for exactly. All I know is that I'm goddamn desperate.

He's been leisurely enjoying my body for what feels like hours, bringing me to the edge and letting me hang there before drawing back again. It's been pure erotic torture and I'm going to fucking explode if it lasts a second longer.

"God, you look so fucking good."

He's still fully dressed but I can feel the hard heat of his cock pressing into my asscheek through the fabric of his pants. It's so close, but out of reach. I want it out so bad, I'm ravenous for it.

"Mal," I half-choke, half-groan. "*Please*."

He squeezes my cock and bites down on my nipple at the same time and I cry out. My arms jerk and the strap around my neck digs in. Every time it pulls tight I get a thrill of arousal so sharp it makes my head spin.

"Fuck, Mal, choke me. Please," I gasp.

He lets out a growl and slots his hand around my throat. It feels fucking good, but it's not enough.

"No, with your cock," I rasp, staring at him. "I want you to choke me with your cock."

His eyebrows rise, and I keep on babbling.

"Please. I need it so bad. I don't want to be able to breathe because your cock is fucking choking off my air. I want it stuffed so fucking far down my throat I pass out. I want to gag on it. Please. Please, Mal. Make me black out with your cock."

I'm aware that I sound utterly fucking ridiculous, but there's nothing I can do, I don't have any control over the words coming out of me. It's a need, an urge. I need his cock choking me right now as much as I

need to breathe the oxygen I want him to deprive me of. As much as I need to eat, to sleep. I can't survive without it.

My request is enough to knock him out of our session. Mal just stares at me, his hands have gone still, and I buck my body against him. A crease forms between his eyebrows and he puts a hand against my chest, holding me still, although his eyes are still just as ravenous.

"Are you sure?" he asks.

"Yes. I know we haven't gone that far before, but I need to try it. Please Mal, I trust you." I lick around my lips and gulp. He still hesitates, still unsure, but I can tell he wants to do it just as much as me. "And you can trust me, too, I'll use the signal if I need to. Please, let me do it."

Slowly he licks his tongue over his lips.

"Ok."

He shifts, lifts me off his lap and pushes me down onto my knees on the floor, holding me steady while I find my balance. Then he sits back in the chair and undoes his pants.

I lick my lips as his cock springs free, huge and hard and already glistening with precum. My mouth waters at the thought of how much it'll fill me, how much it'll choke me. My breath catches.

Mal settles back into his groove and his posture becomes arrogant again, then he jerks his chin at his cock, instructing me to go to work. I lean forward, nuzzling my head between his thighs, and lick from the bottom of his sack up the full length of his cock. He shudders.

I circle the tip of his head with my tongue, licking up the precum and tasting the salty tang of it, letting out a satisfied hum.

He slides his fingers into my hair and closes them in a tight grip, twisting my head up to look at him. With his other hand, he pushes my lips wide open, sliding his fingers in and out, once, twice, sliding them deeper each time until they brush the very back of my tongue and my throat tightens instinctively. He pulls his fingers out, leaving a trail of saliva across my bottom lip, and grips his cock.

He guides it between my lips until it fills my mouth, and I lick the underside of it in little flicks with the tip of my tongue. I look up along the length of his body, and he's staring at me, his dark eyes burning and deep. His face is twisted in a scowl of tightly controlled pleasure.

"Safe signal," he grunts.

I snap my fingers behind my back, a loud click, eager for him to push forward between my already stretched lips. He's so big my jaw is

starting to ache, and it's agony sitting here held in place with his cock just resting on my tongue. I need it to plunge into me, cut off my air. I need it to own me.

His lips curl slightly at one corner and then with a sudden thrust of his hips, he forces his cock down my throat. My body stiffens and my eyes water as my throat automatically tries to force him out, gagging on the hard length of him.

Using the grip on my hair to hold me in place, he starts to pump, working up until he's fucking into my throat, deep and hard. Drool slides over my lips and down my chin.

Then with a grunt he rams in hard and doesn't pull out again, just gives small, aborted thrusts as I swallow around him and take him deeper than ever before.

My throat is screaming at me, my jaw is on fire. The lack of oxygen makes my head spin. My body fights to pull back but I can't go anywhere—I'm bound on my knees and held in place by hands so strong they could snap me. I surrender myself to him entirely as my eyes roll back in my head and tears stream down my cheeks.

My hips jerk on their own and my cock bounces in the air, dripping precum as the sheer inescapable pleasure grips my body in a chokehold. A few more seconds and I'm on the cusp of passing out. Darkness leaks in to fill the edges of the room.

And, *fuck*, why does it feel so fucking good? To have his cock forced so far down my throat that the world wavers? Everything is dark and hazy and I teeter on the edge of climax—

—a moment of suction, a loss of pressure, and suddenly my throat is empty and my lungs automatically suck in ragged breaths. His cock is gone, and the sudden rush of oxygen has my head spinning as the world comes back into focus again.

He's holding my jaw in his hand, watching me closely, and I can see the relief in his eyes. I blink the tears out of my eyes as my body shudders, and I whimper, a pathetic frayed noise, because I want his cock back again.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

"Why did you stop?" I rasp.

I expect him to say something about not wanting to hurt me, but instead he narrows his eyes, digs his fingers into my jaw, curls his lip and says, "You've had enough of my cock, you greedy fucking slut. You'll get more when I give it to you."

My hips jerk involuntarily. Any protest freezes on my lips in the face of his un-fucking-believably sexy sneer. He takes his cock again and holds it an inch from my face, the head glistening with my spit, taunting me. He keeps it there for a moment, just out of reach.

“Now,” he says. “This is going in your other hole.”

Before I can react, he stands and drags me across the room by the bar between my ankles, stopping in front of a huge full-length mirror on wheels tucked in one corner.

“And you’re going to watch me do it.”

10

-North-

HIS FINGERS dig into my aching jaw as he holds my head in place, making me stare straight forward at the image of myself in the mirror.

I take in the lewd image of myself. My legs are spread wide, with the red underwear tucked under my cock and balls so they're propped up obscenely on full display. My dick juts out, painfully hard and livid, with a glistening string of precum weeping from the tip. My arms are tied up firmly behind my back, pushing my chest forward and giving me a great view of my nipples, red and swollen from Mal's attention.

The black harness bands across my body like iron bars, tight, constraining, digging into my thighs, hips, chest and neck, and around my upper arms. I've never felt so trapped, and so painfully aroused. I look like something from a porno. My entire body is pink and flushed, shining with sweat. My hair is an absolute mess, my mouth hanging open, and lips wet. My eyes are blown wide and heavy with arousal. I bite down on my lip. I look completely fucked to hell. And I look like a greedy slut who loves it. This is what Mal does to me.

Is this what I always look like when he fucks me? I've never been one to shy away from getting randy, but being forced to watch myself like this, on full display and being taken apart, it's both humiliating and arousing.

Oh god, look at me. I look absolutely ludicrous and there's nothing I can do about it but watch as it gets worse. I have no control. All I can do is watch as it unfurls in front of me like a dirty video. The kind of video that would make me blush. And I am blushing, even as I moan.

Mal is curled around me, dark and controlling, powerful, like a monster over my shoulder. One hand holding my jaw in place, keeping my eyes forward, the other stroking lightly over my trembling cock as my wide eyes drink it all in.

"Look at you," Mal growls into my ear. "You're my slut."

I nod and my reflection's head jerks; jagged, desperate movements.

I am. For him, I am.

"You're going to watch everything as you take my cock like a whore. As I fuck your greedy hole." He gives my cock one hard twist and I gasp, my body rolling in the reflection. "But first, I want you to watch yourself beg for it."

Oh god, I don't need any more prompting than that. My mouth falls open and I plead, needy and desperate. "Please. I need your cock, Mal. Please."

He strokes his hand up my cock again and another dribble of precum oozes from the tip, pooling between my thighs. "Look at your dick leaking all over the place," he says. "You're so fucking desperate."

"Please. Oh, please," my reflection begs.

My face is twisted up with desperate need, and I look kinda pathetic, like I'm about to cry. I close my eyes, but he digs his fingers into my jaw and shakes me.

"Open your fucking eyes, slut. Look."

I open my eyes again, focusing on my own needy face.

"More," he snarls, his hand ghosting over my cock, almost, but not quite making contact. I move my hips uselessly, trying to reach him.

"Oh my god. P-please, Mal, I want you to fuck me so badly. I'm fucking desperate."

Finally, his hand lands and wraps around my dick, and my heart jumps along with my hips.

"Ok. Since you begged so nicely," he murmurs, and I almost melt. "But . . . you closed your eyes when I didn't tell you to, didn't you? So I'm going to take my sweet time." His hand doesn't loosen on my jaw, and my chest rises and falls as I suck in breath. Fuck, why did I close my eyes. I'm so horny I want to cry. My hips grind against his hand, thrusting my dick into his tight grip.

"I'm sorry, Mal, please—"

"Don't move," he cuts me off. He holds his hand there, still, unmoving, just wrapped tightly around my dick. "We have to work on your obedience first."

I groan. The urge to buck my hips into his tight grip and fuck myself with it until I explode is overwhelming. The tension inside me coils tighter and tighter. My hips start to shake with the intensity of holding them still and I moan again, helplessly.

Please, fuck, please.

His hand moves, and his grip shifts ever so slightly up the length of my dick, the slowest stroke ever. And fuck, the feeling is so good my head flops back onto his shoulder before he jerks it up again, forcing me to look at myself.

I need more, now. But he slides his hand up slowly, slowly, until he reaches the tip, grips, twists, and then eases back down again. Mirror North is visibly shaking, beads of sweat stand out across my chest with the torture of keeping still.

His hand reaches the base of my cock, and I lose control. My hips buck up on their own, my dick slams into his hand, and the feeling makes my head spin. I try again, but suddenly the grip is gone, and my dick is thrusting up into thin air. I wail and keep thrusting, unable to stop.

"I told you to keep still," Mal snarls. "Stop disobeying me. I'm not touching you again until you do as I say. Do you want me to jerk you off? Or do you want to stay tied up, naked and alone for the rest of the night?"

"No. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Mal." I shake my head furiously, whimpering and trying to get control over my body again. With some concentration I manage to get my hips to stop, and hold myself still. His dark eyes watch me in the mirror like a hawk.

After what feels like forever, he reaches around again, the sweet grip returns to my cock, and I sigh at the pleasure that blooms through me. I can feel his chest pressed against my back, the rise and fall of his breath, and the hard lump of his erection.

He starts stroking again and this time I somehow manage to hold still as the pace gradually picks up. It's still not enough, though, the sensation just this side of torture.

"Now," he murmurs into my ear, his dark eyes flashing in the mirror. "Come for me."

My eyes snap wide and I look at him in the reflection.

"That's right," he says. "I'm not going any faster. If you want to come, you'll do it because I say so."

I suck in a ragged breath at his words. But it's not enough, I need more.

"I-I can't—"

"You'll come when I fucking tell you to, Nolan," he says, and my reflection shudders uncontrollably. "You'll shoot your load on command

like the needy slut you are. Now, come for me."

He keeps up the same pace, and even though it's agonizingly slow I can feel myself tipping over the edge.

"Ah fuck. Fuck, I'm going to—"

He squeezes my jaw, keeping my gaze locked on myself. My mouth falls open as I tip over the edge. My whole body tenses. The lines of my muscles stand out and strain against the straps of the harness. My hips jerk. Then the pleasure rolls through me like a glacial wave, slow and unstoppable. White ropes of cum erupt from my dick, coating Mal's hand and my own spread thighs. My breath stutters as I orgasm in slow rolling ripples that don't stop as he keeps stroking me through it with the same agonizingly slow pace. I tremble under his hand as my cum spills down my thighs and pools in front of me. And all the while, as I gasp and roll through my orgasm, I can't take my eyes off my own twitching cock.

"Good boy," Mal purrs. I whimper between trembling pants as he finally releases my jaw and I collapse back against him, body liquid and spent. He traces the cum on his hand across my belly, up to my throat.

"Now I'm going to make you come again on my cock, Nolan," he growls, hot against the back of my neck. "Do you want that?"

Despite the warm cloud engulfing me, the hairs on my nape stand on end, and I nod loosely.

He hooks his arms around my chest and moves me, repositioning my limp body so that I'm on my knees with my rear in the air and my cheek pressed into the ground. He takes care to pull the mirror around so I can still see myself, ass up, arms bound behind me, so ready to be fucked.

He kneels behind me and eases my underwear down just enough so it cups my ass cheeks, then reaches around and strokes my dick as he fingers my asshole, massaging the muscle around my ring in warm circles before dipping his fingers inside. He curls them and stretches me while I watch in the reflection. With every movement of his hands, my body jumps and twitches, like my skin is alive. I look even more helpless like this—a prisoner to his pleasure. To *my* pleasure.

He takes his time to work me open bit by bit, pausing to spank my raised ass when the mood takes him. Each time he does, the loud crack echoes through the room, and I jerk and cry out before my back flexes, offering my ass up to him again. So fucking needy. I can see him smiling with satisfaction in the mirror, and the reverence in his face as

he takes in my pink ass, smooths his hand over it and then slaps it again with his palm.

He's so preoccupied I could probably close my eyes again without him noticing, but I don't want to. I want to watch as he works me over, makes me sweat and drool. I want to see the way he makes my muscles jump and twitch, the involuntary way my hips push back, presenting myself to him for more, more, more. And I want to see the possessive, ravenous look on his face while he does it.

My dick is rock hard again now, hanging heavy between my spread thighs. Finally, when I'm open enough, I watch, enthralled, as he leans back and pulls out a packet of lube from his back pocket. He has a whole pump bottle of it in his closet on the far side of the room, but he doesn't even want to go *that far* to get it. He tears the sachet open with his teeth.

He slathers the lube all over my ass, working it into my hole with two fingers, and then wipes the rest onto the length of his cock.

Here it comes. I watch in rapt anticipation as my mouth waters and I try to inch my knees even wider. My hips tip up on their own, ready for him. Needing him.

He stands and strips out of his pants, then slides his top off, standing completely naked in all his glory. His eyes meet mine in the mirror and he stands there, letting me take him in.

God he's so fucking tall, towering over me where I'm bent and spread on the floor for him to do with as he wishes. Fully exposed and tied in place. He looks so powerful, the low light of the room glinting off the tight lines of his body, his slim waist, and wide shoulders. His built arms.

And fuck me, his glorious cock. Long and thick with a slight upward curve, and the heavy swell of his balls underneath. I almost forget how to breathe as he takes his dick in his hand and, not taking his eyes off mine, gives it two powerful jerks, the muscles of his thighs and abs twitching.

"Fuck, Mal, I love you," I breathe without even realizing it.

His face falters for a split second and the mask slips. He blinks rapidly, and a slight smile warms his mouth before he represses it quickly with a fierce scowl. But I can still see the shy happiness beneath it.

"I didn't say you could speak," he says, bringing his hand down on my ass again with a crack.

I jerk and hiss, my swollen cock swinging.

"Sorry, Mal," I say, trying to sound like I'm actually sorry and not like I'm loving every damn second of this.

"I think it's time I put you in your place," he growls, taking position behind me.

Fuck, yes please. I don't say it out loud. I don't want to do anything that'll make him delay any more. I try to look suitably scared to keep up the act, but my reflection only looks fucking desperate to have my brains fucked into the floor.

He gets down on his knees and lines his cock up to my asshole. I try to relax, knowing what's coming, but just seeing him taking his place, the size of his cock as it lines up to fuck me, my body tenses in anticipation. I can't take my eyes off it. He holds there for a moment, watching me, knowing exactly what he's doing, and the muscles of my shoulders twitch.

Then he puts one hand on my hip, the other on his cock, and pushes forward. My breath catches and my eyes fly wide as his dick disappears inside me. I stretch around him and go rigid as the burn sizzles through me.

My mouth opens in a silent "ah" as he keeps sliding in, filling me up until his hips press flush against my ass. Mirror North looks like a stranded fish.

Mal's ass muscles clench as he draws back out slowly, before pushing back in again. He looks furious, his eyebrows so low I can barely see his eyes, his mouth twisted into a snarl, the cords in his neck standing out. All I can do is watch and take it as he thrusts into me, curving his cock into my body with increasing speed.

"Fuck, North, you feel so good," he grits out.

He reaches around and grabs my cock again. I make a low moaning noise as he jerks it roughly in time with his thrusts, snapping my hips in time with his, meeting each thrust, as bolts of hot pleasure shoot through my core to gather and pool in my belly.

He gets faster and faster, driving me into the floor harder and harder until each thrust pushes me forward. My eyes are heavy-lidded, my mouth open in a silent scream of pleasure. I barely recognize myself in my reflection as my body judders, my ass cheeks bouncing. A line of drool wets my lips and tears leak from my eyes.

Mal's face screws up as he slams into me, and the silent cry mirrors my own. Then he hits that spot that makes sparks fly, and his hips start

to jackhammer. He folds over me, shoves a finger into my mouth and I suck greedily like my life depends on it. He bites down on my shoulder, hard enough for the pain to shoot through me and straight to my dick.

I cry out as I come, hard. My dick jerks and the orgasm engulfs me, making every muscle in my body strain. My reflection shifts out of focus as my eyes roll back and everything goes fuzzy.

I can hear a low, strangled moan that continues while my body jerks, but I don't know who the noise is coming from. The waves of my orgasm smash through me again and again. My toes curl, my hands fist behind me.

Finally, I come down from the high to find my body still juddering. Mal is still slamming into me, faster and faster. He drops my dick and grips my hips hard enough to bruise, to stop me from sliding to the floor as my body turns to liquid, entirely limp with bliss.

I crack my eyes open and see him ramming into my body. I look completely fucked out, mouth open, a line of drool trailing from my lips, my eyes half-closed, tears streaming.

The muscles of Mal's body stand out as he pounds into me.

Finally, he goes rigid, his entire body tenses, the muscles of his arms and ass standing out as he throws his head back and fills me with his load.

He looks like a fucking god.

I stare as he jerks, grunting, his dark hair falling over his face as his orgasm hits him and his hips stutter to a stop. It's mesmerizing. Then he melts and flops forward over me. Without him holding me up, I flatten out onto the floor, sliding down into a puddle of cum, sweat, and drool. We lie like that, his weight laid out on top of me, pinning me to the floor with my arms between us and my legs spread wide, with his cock still inside me, and our breaths heaving in tandem.

"Fuck," he breathes against my ear.

"Fuck," I rasp back in agreement.

11

-Malcolm-

WE TAKE our time cleaning each other. I rub the suds in slow lazy circles over his back and chest, washing away the sweat and dried cum. There are dark marks on his hips, five on each side in the shape of my fingers where I gripped him too hard, and I rub them gently.

We kiss, and in my post-sex glow, I wonder why I was ever afraid of this? Kissing? It's perfect. The way our wet lips slip against each other, the catch of a tooth, hard against the softness. The way his tongue swipes over mine, licking into me. The feel of his breath mingling with my own before I breathe it in. It feels almost as good as fucking him into the floor.

This feels so *close*. I know I just fucked him five ways from Sunday, but this feels far more intimate.

And I never would have let myself experience this if North hadn't come barreling into my life, demanding things I thought I couldn't give him, and opening me up in ways I've always been closed. And I'm so fucking glad he did.

I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't acted like a total psycho and jerked off on the football field that night. If he hadn't seen me and taken that video. Would we still have ended up together? Or would he still be just an untouchable fantasy that I furiously masturbate to? Back then, the thought of him being in my world was so impossible, and yet here he is. Here we are.

After the shower, we wrap up in our matching white robes.

I hold his out for him and as he slips his arms in he says, "You really just found these in one of the closets? They look brand new."

I shrug. Hopefully he'll never find the receipts I threw in the trash. Me buying matching fluffy bathrobes for us? I'd never live it down. Thank fuck I didn't get them monogrammed. I'd never have been able to play that off as a coincidence.

Judging from the look North is giving me, he probably doesn't believe me anyway, but he strokes the soft fabric appreciatively.

"Lucky you found them, then. They're the perfect fit too."

I clear my throat. "Yeah."

I head downstairs while he lounges on the bed, and make one mug of decaf coffee and one hot chocolate with extra whipped cream and marshmallows. He's burned off more than enough calories tonight to earn it. That's what I tell myself, as I add a grating of dark chocolate on top.

On the way back upstairs, I pass the session room with the door hanging open, and smile to myself as I replay the events that just took place there. One for the memory books.

It's a mess in there, clothes and restraints strewn across the floor. I'll clear it up tomorrow. Right now, there's a hot-as-fuck young man upstairs waiting for his cocoa.

Back in my room, I hand the mug over to North, propped up on my pillows.

"Mmm, damn," North says, taking a sip and flopping his head back. A line of whipped cream sits above his top lip, like a mustache. "Have I told you I love you yet?"

I grunt, lean over, and lick the cream from his plump lip. "You might have mentioned it once or twice."

He laughs and uses the opportunity to give me a swift kiss, before he tilts his head away to look me full in the face, his blue eyes sparkling. "Then another can't hurt. I fucking love you, Mal."

It gets me every fucking time. I sit back in the pillows next to him as the stupid sappy emotion rises up my throat out of nowhere and makes my eyes sting.

I look into my coffee, clear my throat, and mutter, "Shut up."

He's too powerful. And judging by his wicked grin, he knows it. I glance up at him.

"Don't look so smug," I say.

He sits back and kicks his legs out, revealing a long stretch of his toned thigh, dusted with sandy hair, and takes another sip. "Why not? I've got a lot to be smug about."

I have a lot to be smug about. And he's sitting right next to me. And there's something I want to say to him. He deserves to hear it, and hell, I deserve to get to say it too.

He sips his hot chocolate, completely oblivious, while I work up the courage to say the words.

"North," I say, and clear my throat again.

"Mmhmm?" he grunts as he gulps his chocolate.

I watch his throat bob as he swallows. "I . . . uh . . ." I clear my throat again, and pick some fluff from the bathrobe. He seems to catch on that something is up and looks over at me. Why does it suddenly feel so hot in here? "I—"

There's a crash from downstairs, followed by the noise of something tipping over and smashing to the ground. I sit bolt upright. North jerks at the same time, spilling hot chocolate down the front of his bathrobe.

"What was that?"

North frowns at me. I stand up, put my drink down, and walk to the bedroom door. Is someone down there?

"Did you lock the front door?" I ask.

"I think so."

North climbs off the bed and then goes and grabs the baseball bat that I keep leaning up against my bookshelf. He hefts it in his hand, weighing it, and nods.

If someone thinks they can break in here and steal my shit, they're in for a fucking shock. They just made the biggest mistake of their life.

I storm down the stairs, my robe flying around me, with North on my heels. In the hallway, the front door is hanging open, and there's a dent in the wall where the handle hit it and a chip missing from the paint. Did they kick the fucking door in?

"Fuck," North says.

There's another bang behind us and I run toward it, heart pounding with fury. This intruder picked the wrong fucking house. I round into the session room, North bringing up the rear with the bat—

I freeze.

It's not an intruder.

It's . . . my father.

My father is standing in the middle of the session room.

My father is staring around at the toys still strewn around the room from the epic fuck North and I just had. At the specially modified furniture. At the straps and hooks and ropes.

My father, with a look on his face that makes the rage evaporate from my body. That makes me want to curl into a protective ball. That

makes me want to duck and run and find somewhere small and safe to hide.

It's the face that I've feared my entire life, only ten times worse.

His eyes meet mine and everything stops.

"What the fuck is this?"

12

-North-

OH. SHIT.

Time seems to stand still.

Patrick Blackwood is standing in the middle of our kinky sex den with his mouth hanging open, looking like he's just given birth to an elephant. I don't know if he actually expects us to answer his question or not, but we're both too shocked to speak.

Mal stares at his dad. His dad stares back at him. Patrick is *furious*. His eyes bulging, his nostrils flared. He looks so angry that for a moment I'm *scared*. The pure fury on his face is enough to jump straight to my hindbrain and kick my fight or flight into life. I know I should do something. Say something. But it's like the force of his rage has knocked everything out of me. I'm not used to this kind of anger. And it's not even directed at me. Its full force is aimed right at Mal, who isn't moving. It doesn't even look like he's breathing.

I thought before that Mal and his father might be similar in some ways; Mal can be an emotional guy, and he can have trouble controlling those emotions. I was wrong, they're nothing like each other.

Mal's anger can be cold and withering, like a frost, or bitter and stinging like ice.

But this is like a tidal wave that knocks you off your feet. A raw surge of hatred and rage that's so pure it's like fire—a raging inferno.

I think about young Mal having to face this on his own as a child, and it makes me feel sick. How the fuck did he survive mostly intact?

Patrick's face is bright red, making his grey eyes stand out, cold and sharp. He looks like he's going to explode.

"Answer me!" he shouts, and we both flinch.

We still haven't made a sound. Neither of us has moved at all.

"I don't give a fuck if you're gay, but this? What the fuck is this deviant shit?"

He tips over the table. Everything goes flying and crashing to the floor, and Mal flinches again.

"I didn't spend all this money on your college education so you could come down here and be a pervert. What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Mal finally makes a sound. A small shuddering intake of breath that sounds like something a terrified kid would make, and not a strong well-built man well over six feet tall.

It cuts through the shock weighing me down and kicks something open in my chest, and just like that, the fear is gone.

Mal needs me. He needs me right now, more than he ever has before. Mal has been through so much shit in his life because of this man, and I'm just standing here letting his abuser terrify him. I've never seen him like this before. His eyes are wide and glazed.

It stops here. I'm not going to let him get hurt anymore.

"Ok, just calm the fuck down," I say, stepping forward and raising a hand.

Patrick's attention snaps to me and his steely eyes focus like a target, narrow as if he's remembering I'm there for the first time, and then just as quickly snap back to Mal, dismissing me entirely.

"Is this him?" He jabs a finger at me. A viscous, sharp stabbing movement, and I have to fight the need to take a step back. "Is he the one that got you into all this shit? Because you sure as fuck were normal when you left home."

Mal doesn't react.

"What did I do to deserve this? After all the shit I've had to go through, after all the effort I've put into building my business and raising your sorry ass, you couldn't just be fucking normal?"

Mal doesn't speak. He doesn't move.

I step forward. "That's enough. You need to leave, right now."

Patrick's face somehow gets more red, and he takes a step forward himself. "I own this fucking house you little prick." He jabs his finger at me again. "What have you done to him? Huh? What sick stuff have you got him involved in? I've seen the credit card bills, you think I'm fucking stupid?"

"Mal can do whatever he wants. I haven't done anything to him, which is more than I can say for you—"

He shouts over me. "Of course you're a fucking weirdo. I should have known he wouldn't have a goddam normal friend."

He takes another step forward, hands clenched and threatening, and I move in front of Mal, blocking him completely, and Patrick stops short. He takes in our positions, our matching robes. He sneers.

"You're pathetic."

"What's pathetic is a fully grown man beating on his son," I say.

His eyes don't widen, but they take on a gleam as he tilts his head, like he's figuring something out. His sneer doesn't budge, but I can see the thoughts whirling in his head. Then he smiles grimly and pulls out his phone.

"That's it. I'm not paying for you to attend a college hundreds of miles away so you can fuck around. You're coming back home with me."

Horror flashes through my body. He can't do that, can he?

"What?" Mal says. It's the first thing he's said, and I turn to look at him because his voice is so small, so un-Mal-like. What color was left in Mal's face has drained, leaving him looking washed out and dead, like a corpse somehow still standing.

Patrick is already furiously typing into his phone.

"Get your shit packed. I'm taking you out of Langley and you're moving back in with me. You can attend a college close by, where I can keep a fucking eye on you."

"You can't take him out," I say.

"Don't tell me what I can do," Patrick snaps. "I'm his goddamn father."

"Mal?" I say, turning to him.

Mal's eyes shift over to my face without really taking anything in, a startled rabbit.

"You can't go, Mal. You can't."

"I can't," Mal repeats.

"Excuse me?" Patrick says. He's stopped typing into his phone now.

Mal's mouth moves a few times before he actually speaks, and when he does, his voice is breathy and insubstantial. "I can't. I can't leave," he says.

Patrick stares at him for a second before he slams his phone down on the table next to him. I'll be surprised if the screen isn't cracked. Mal cringes, blinking rapidly.

"Are you trying to antagonize me?" Patrick says. "You're coming with me. End of discussion."

Mal opens his mouth, but no words come out.

I speak up for him. “You can’t make him do anything. He’s an adult.”

“You need to get the fuck out of here, son, or you’re going to regret it.” Patrick nods as he speaks, like he’s aggressively agreeing with himself, and moves toward me. Mal finally finds his voice again.

“I’m not leaving Langley, and I’m not coming home. You can’t make me,” Mal says. He sounds breathless. Terrified.

I strengthen my stance in front of him.

His dad stops and looks at him, weighing him up. His anger is twisted with surprise. Is this the first time Mal’s ever stood up to him? Directly disobeyed him? If his dad gets physical he’s going to have to get through me first, and I won’t be going down without a fight. In fact, I’d gladly take the opportunity to punch his lights out.

“Excuse me?” Mal’s dad says, leaning forward.

Mal audibly swallows, and then says, “I’m not going anywhere.”

His dad blinks a few times, looking him up and down like he’s some freak of nature.

“What makes you think—” he starts.

“He *said* he’s not going anywhere,” I say.

He looks at me, then back to Mal. It seems like he’s realizing for the first time that there’s two of us, and we’re big guys. His old tried-and-tested intimidation techniques aren’t going to work this time. He grinds his jaw, picks up his phone again, and jabs a finger at us.

“This isn’t over. I’m taking you back in the morning.”

I remember the bat. I’m gripping it so hard my hand hurts. He looks down at it.

“You planning to do something with that?” he says.

I blink at him. Up to this point it hadn’t even occurred to me.

He sneers. “Thought not.”

He storms out, barging past us and making sure to shoulder check me on the way out. It feels like a small victory, if only temporary. We’ve won this fight, but the battle isn’t over. If his dad really does stop paying for his tuition, is there a way for Mal to stay? My head is spinning. It feels like the whole world has been turned upside down and everything is tumbling down around us.

I turn to Mal. He’s still standing stiff and frozen in exactly the same position, his face a blank mask of shock, his lips parted, staring at nothing.

“I’m not going to let him do anything to you, ok?” I say. He doesn’t move, so I touch his arm gently, like I’m afraid he’ll spook and run away like a startled animal. His eyes slowly move over to me, finding my face, and he stares at me like I’m the lifeline of a drowning man. “If he tries anything I’m calling the cops on his ass.”

Mal licks his lips, swallows, and then nods stiffly. But he doesn’t quite look like he believes me. He doesn’t look reassured.

“I promise, Mal, I’m not going to let anything happen. You’re staying here with me, even if you have to bunk in my dorm room.”

I have no idea how I’m going to do that. It’s not like I have anywhere near enough money to pay for his fees. I’m on a partial football scholarship as it is. But I’ll fucking make it work if I have to.

“I swear, Mal. I swear.”

I wrap him up in a big hug, trying to soothe his trembling shoulders under my hands.

13

-North-

THERE'S NO sign of Patrick all night. Mal doesn't sleep, and I'm too wired to.

The next morning Mal's phone rings. We exchange a glance as he answers. He listens and, after a brief conversation where his only response is a stiff "ok," he hangs up, puts the phone down, and looks at it.

"What is it?" I ask.

His face is carefully blank. "I have to go in to the college admissions office," he says. "There's an issue with my financing."

Shit. Last night's victory already feels like it's slipping away.

"Ok, let's go in," I say.

We drive in tense silence. He stares ahead out of the windshield with a blank glaze over his face, but I know he's internally panicking, because I am too. If his dad has stopped paying for his tuition, how is he going to stay at the college? We need to have a plan.

"What are you going to do?" I ask quietly. "Even if you can't study at Langley anymore, you can't move back home with him."

His shoulders are slumped, and I can see he's half given up already. I understand victims of abuse can feel like they have no control over their own life.

"I don't know. I could pay it myself, but it's his money. He can cut me off if he decides to. And I don't know if he'll let me stay at the house. If he kicks me out, I might not have much choice."

And that's the problem. Mal is an adult, and his dad can't make him do anything, but he can cut off Mal's money, his place to live. And that cuts off everything else.

"Mal, I'm not going to let you go back. Ok?"

He nods, chewing on his lips.

"I love you. You're not going anywhere."

He blinks and lets go of the wheel to swipe his eyes with the back of his hand.

When we get to the office, I kiss him before he goes in. “We’ll work something out, ok? And anyway, this might not be what we think. There might just be a clerical issue that needs to be cleared up or something.”

I know it’s a lame attempt at optimism, even as I’m saying it. He doesn’t look at me, just gives one last defeated nod, and then he turns and walks stiffly through the swinging door.

I wait around for a while, fidgeting and pacing. It feels like he’s in there forever, but it’s probably only been a few minutes. My head is going in circles, and I need to be able to think clearly. If I wait around here I’m going to go out of my mind. I need a distraction. Neither of us has eaten anything today, and things always look better on a full stomach, so I decide to go get us some brunch.

The local food court is just around the corner from campus, so I head over there. They do those waffles and chicken Mal pretends not to like, so I order some of them and then dither over the rest of the menu. When I’m stressed I like to eat, and right now my body is craving sugar, salt, fat, and grease, in equal measures.

Five minutes later I come out balancing four cartons in one hand: waffles, pancakes with extra bacon, French toast, and a breakfast wrap. Even if Mal doesn’t want the waffles there’s gotta be something in here he’ll eat. In the other hand I polish off a bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich, licking the egg yolk from my fingers, and my stomach grumbles appreciatively as the grease gets to work.

I already feel better, my head clearer, and my outlook more optimistic. Maybe it’s the egg and cheese talking, but everything is going to be ok. We’re going to work this out. Even if Mal has to drop out of college and his dad kicks him out of his house, he’s not going back with him. Mal can stay with me. It’ll take a little getting used to for him, moving from a mansion to my dorm room, but I’ll make it work. And outside of term time my family will put him up. Sure, their house isn’t great, but it’s got to be better than living with that asshole of a dad. And I know my folks would love to meet him.

I smile to myself as I lick the last of the grease off my thumb. Yeah, it’s going to be fine.

I make my way back through the crowded food court, checking my phone for any update from Mal, when someone speaks behind me.

“It’s North, right?”

I turn around.

Patrick Blackwood is standing behind me.

The difference between him and Mal after last night is stark. This morning Mal was crumpled, tired, and pale. He looked defeated and beaten down, an absolute mess compared to his usual self.

Patrick's suit is neat and perfectly pressed, his hair is styled and slicked back. He looks like he's just had the best night's sleep of his life. Like ruining his son's life isn't a big deal. And I just have to say it's a good thing my hands are full right now or they'd be around his goddamn neck.

"What are you doing here?" I say. "You can't intimidate me."

"Then that makes you as dumb as you look," he says smoothly.

"I know what you've been doing to Mal his whole life, and it stops right fucking now."

He laughs humorlessly. "I don't know what Malcolm's told you, but I highly doubt any of it is true. He's always been somewhat overdramatic. He likes to exaggerate. I guess he enjoys the attention."

God, this fucking guy. I want to smash his face into the ground, but I promised Mal I wouldn't do anything. I promised. And that's the only thing holding me back. Still, I adjust my grip on the food cartons as my knuckles itch.

I won't do anything rash, but I can't stop myself from saying, "Did it make you feel big beating up a kid?" I can barely speak, my jaw is clenched so hard. "Can't take on people your own size? People like you disgust me. You're a coward."

His face deadpans, like he's heard all of this before and he's tired as hell of hearing it.

"I gave everything to him. I have worked tirelessly to provide everything he could possibly need and more. And I don't ask for a fucking thing in return. Just some goddamn respect and appreciation."

People like him will never learn. They will never realize or accept that what they do is wrong.

"You don't deserve respect," I spit.

Patrick curls his lip. "I've been around far longer than you, kid, and I know your type exactly." He steps closer to me, so cocky and sure of himself, and my conviction to keep my promise wavers dangerously. "The hillbilly freeloader who just can't help himself when he sees a pathetic guy like my son with money to spend. I'll bet Malcolm was an

easy target huh? Weak-minded, willing to do whatever you wanted for a piece of ass?"

"Mal is the least weak-minded person I have ever met, you sack of shit. You know absolutely nothing about him."

He stares at me with a possessive gleam in his eye that turns my stomach. "I *raised* him. If you think I'm going to let you ruin my son's life any more than he already has, you're mistaken. I know exactly how to deal with people like you."

That fires off in my head and I shift my stance. But he just snorts and reaches into his pocket. "I didn't get where I am today by being dumb. I'm not here for a fight." He pulls something out. A checkbook. Then produces a pen from his other pocket and clicks it. "How much?"

I blink at him, totally blindsided. "What?"

He looks at me like I'm a fucking idiot, and gestures with his pen. "How much to leave my son alone?"

It still takes me far too long to figure out what he means. I was ready for some kind of threat and now he's . . . offering me money? I try to back up, but the mental gear change has me spinning. He can't be saying what I think he's saying.

"Excuse me?"

"Are you fucking dumb?" He raises his voice and enunciates each word, shooting it out like a bullet. "How much money will it take for you to end it with my son? End it, dump him, whatever, I don't fucking care, but just keep the fuck away from him. I don't know what you've done to make him act like this, but it stops now."

He's offering to pay me money to break up with his son. To break up with Mal.

The thought makes me sick. After what he's been through, something like that would absolutely *destroy* him.

And I know, after everything that Mal has told me, after everything I've seen with my own eyes, I know I shouldn't be shocked that Patrick would do something like this, that he would sink this low.

What kind of father would do that to his own son? But the answer is right in front of me, waving his pen and checkbook in my face like I'm the dumbest person he's ever met. The kind that sees his own son as a possession, like something he owns, and not a human being at all.

"Do you understand how much damage that would do to him?" I say.

"He'll get over it."

“It’ll *destroy* him.”

He snorts. And it dawns on me that he actually doesn’t care. He doesn’t care if it would break Mal’s heart, because that’s exactly what he wants. He wants Mal to be alone and broken so he can control him, so he’ll go home with Patrick without putting up a fight. That’s what he decided needed to happen when Malcolm said no to him.

And then he says, quietly, flippantly, “Not as much as I will.”

I see red.

Everything moves in slow motion. The food cartons hit the ground. Waffles, bacon, and pancakes spill across the ground.

My shoulder connects hard with his stomach in a low tackle. He folds around me with a satisfying *oof* of air.

The checkbook and pen fly off in opposite directions as he goes down under my full weight and crashes to the floor.

Then everything speeds up into a blur of furious motion as my body takes over. My brain doesn’t process any thoughts, just the need to take out Mal’s pain on this monster. To make him feel as bad as he’s made Mal feel his whole life.

I get my knees around his chest and straddle him with his arms pinned, so he can’t defend himself. Just like Mal couldn’t defend himself.

Slamming my fists into his face again and again, my body jolts with each impact, sending splintering force up my arms that makes my blood sing.

He struggles, trying to squirm out from under me, but I’m two hundred pounds of pure fury and muscle, and he’s nothing but an overgrown bully.

I grit my teeth and keep on going until there’s blood smeared across my hands.

Someone calls my name from a distance, but it barely registers through the red haze.

Patrick’s nose crunches under my knuckles and blood gushes out. His eyes are round and wide and I drink it in like it’s the sweetest thing I’ve ever tasted.

Hands pull at me, hooking under my armpits, and I fight them, desperate for more. I manage one last punch before I’m pulled away, panting.

He slithers back away from me, clutching at his face, fear painted all over him. Fierce pleasure surges through me at the sight.

“Don’t like it when they fight back?” I growl. “Stay away from Mal, or I will fucking end you, you abusive piece of shit.”

The red haze fades and I finally take in my surroundings again. There’s a crowd of silent faces watching us. I recognize Randy, Paul, and a few other people from college among them. Randy is next to me, holding onto me tightly with his arms under mine and wrapped around my chest like I might surge back in for round two. And I just might.

“What the fuck, man?” he says.

Patrick struggles to his feet and he looks like he’s about to run away, but then he turns back, the fear drains from his eyes and they light with hatred.

“You’ve just made a huge fucking mistake you little shit,” he says, and spits blood on the ground. “I’ve got the best fucking lawyers money can buy. I hope you enjoy prison food because that’s where you’re gonna be for the next fifteen years.”

As if summoned by his words, the flash of police sirens echoes around the buildings. The last of the red fades away.

Oh shit. What have I done?

Patrick smiles, and there’s blood on his teeth. “Good luck trying to make bail with your trailer-trash family.”

14

-Malcolm-

“UNFORTUNATELY, WE can’t offer you a scholarship at this time,” the finance officer says, with a pained, pitying expression that makes my skin crawl. I dig my fingers into my thighs and nod.

It’s exactly what I feared; my father has retracted my funding, effective immediately. I won’t be able to attend Langley going forward, unless I come up with another way of paying.

“Here are the information sheets about the different financing options.” He slides the pamphlets across the table, and I don’t even bother looking at them. “There are several options you can look at, some schemes for the less financially stable students. Check to see if you may be eligible for any.”

My eyes are fixed on a spot on the wall above the officer’s head, and I can feel a cold sweat all over my body.

I’m not going to be able to finance myself, and I won’t take any of North’s money. I know he’d offer, even though his family can’t afford it. I could try to apply for a loan, but it’ll take time to go through the process, and what’s the fucking point? There’s only one way this is going. Sooner or later, my father always wins. And the truth is, I’m too much of a chickenshit coward to do anything about it.

The officer nudges the pamphlets closer to me, and I pick them up anyway—if it’ll make him stop talking so I can get the fuck out of here.

He seems to be waiting for some kind of input from me, but I’ve barely spoken since I walked in. I don’t think I can. The sinking dread that engulfed me when I saw my father in the session room has spread through my body like a virus, and in my mind I’m already back there—it’s only a matter of time now. I feel like I’m going to slowly calcify, my heart will stop beating, my lungs will stiffen.

“. . . and as I said before, this is an unpleasant but necessary conversation.” The officer is still talking, trying to fill the yawning silence

between us.

I can't deal with his wheedling pity. I need to get out of here. I'm going to peel my skin off if I have to sit here a moment longer.

"We done?" I bark, cutting off his rambling.

He sits up looking startled. "Uh. Oh. Yes, I suppose so, if you have all the information you—"

I don't wait for him to finish. I push the chair back and the legs screech painfully on the tiled floor. The officer rises from his seat, too, and starts to say something, but I'm out of the room and slamming the door behind me before he can get the words out.

I need to get some air into my too-tight lungs. I need to see North. He'll know what to say to calm me down. Even if it'll do no good in the end, I just need to breathe for a moment.

But when I stumble back out into the hallway, it's empty. North isn't here.

I check my phone.

Nothing.

His absence makes my lungs squeeze even tighter, and I screw my eyes shut and shove the phone back in my pocket, trying to fight down the new surge of unprecedented panic. Just because he's not waiting outside the room for me like a well-trained dog and hasn't texted me to let me know exactly where he is, doesn't mean anything. *He hasn't decided to leave me. He isn't gone*. I try to think clearly, but my head feels muddled. He doesn't have any classes this morning, so he can't be there. And . . .

We didn't eat anything before we left the house, and he's always hungry, so he's probably in his dorm, the cafeteria, or at the food court getting something.

Ok, that makes sense.

I get my phone out again, drawing a slow breath through my teeth to cool myself down, and shoot him a text telling him I'm done. I've made it all the way to the cafeteria before I check my phone again just to make sure I haven't missed his text or call.

Still nothing.

What if this is all too much for him—the drama with my father, the threats, me losing my shit—and he's decided I'm not worth the effort after all? My stomach turns over.

No, it isn't that. He loves me. He told me so. I'm just spiraling because of all this shit going on. He loves me and he wouldn't leave

me. That's how love works, right? You wouldn't say shit like that to someone if you don't mean it, right?

There's no sign of him in the cafeteria, so I drive over to his dorm. It makes sense that he'd go there. Even though we've agreed for him to move in with me, most of his stuff is still in his room. Maybe he just wanted some time to himself to process things.

But when I get to his dorm the room is empty, and there's no sign of him in the kitchen or lounge area.

I check my phone again. He hasn't returned any of my texts or calls. It goes off in my hand and I jump so much I almost drop it in my haste to answer. But the number flashing across the screen isn't North's, it's Randy's. Apparently I have his number, although I don't remember ever saving it. I debate letting it ring out, but maybe North's phone died and he's borrowing someone else's.

"Randy?" I ask.

"Hey, dude, are you ok?" he says. His voice is tight with concern.

"What? I'm—" For a moment I think he's calling me because he knows that I'm freaking out. But I haven't seen him since yesterday. "Yeah, why? Why are you calling me?"

"Where are you, dude? North just got arrested."

There's a beat of silence. "What?"

"He just attacked some dude in the food court, man. I have no idea why, but he went fucking nuts. The cops dragged him away."

I choke. "He . . . what?!"

"Dude, it was in front of everyone. He pulverized the guy. And that dude from North's dorm, Paul, called the cops on his ass."

My head is spinning. There's too much information to take in. "Paul?"

"It was some dude in a suit. I thought he was gonna kill him, but I managed to get him off. The cops dragged him away, and I don't know what the fuck to do, man. You weren't there and you guys are always together, so I didn't know if something had happened with you guys or . . . What the fuck man?"

My heart stops beating. *A man in a suit*. I know exactly who that is. The dread that's been suffocating me closes in even more. North got into a fight with my father, and now he's been arrested.

At that moment, I see Paul walking toward me, looking like he doesn't have a care in the world, with his hands full of paper binders. I hang up the phone, cutting Randy off mid-sentence. Paul spots me and

gives me a small, suppressed smile, like he knows a joke I'm not in on. Only I'm in on it.

"You looking for North?" he says.

I slap the binders out of his hands and they scatter on the floor, shedding sheaths of paper.

"Hey—" he starts.

I grab him by the collar and shove his back against the wall, and he drops the self-satisfied smirk real fucking quick.

"You called the fucking cops?"

Paul pushes against me, but I twist my fist into his collar even harder. "He was beating up some random guy. I was just doing what any good citizen would have done."

"That's not why you did it."

Paul's face twists. "Yeah, well. Karma's a bitch. Fuck North, and fuck you."

I snarl and shove him back into the wall. I want to bury my fist in his face, but I let go of him and he stumbles away.

I turn and run.

15

-Malcolm-

“I’M SORRY but I can’t give out any information regarding that.”

I slam my hands down on the desk and the receptionist looks at me with a tired expression that says she’s dealt with far worse.

I must have broken every speed limit on the way to the county jail, but now I’m here they won’t let me see North, or even confirm if he’s here at all. And this lady doesn’t look like she’s going to budge an inch.

“I need to see him,” I grit out through my teeth.

“Any contact between you and any suspect that we might or might not be holding will be made through their allocated phone call. Other than that, I can’t help you.”

“But I haven’t had any calls,” I say. North would have called me if he had the chance, I’m sure of it.

She raises an uninterested eyebrow and says, “That’s none of my business.”

I growl and tear away from the desk, slamming back through the station doors I entered ten minutes ago. This isn’t getting me anywhere and there’s no point in getting mad at the front desk. I need to think, but my head is spinning in a whirlwind of panic, so I pace in front of the station trying to get my head clear.

Why would North do this? My father must have provoked him, I have no doubt about that, but North swore to me that he wouldn’t do anything. Now he’s let my father ruin his life, too, and Patrick will throw everything he can at North just to see what sticks. North stood up to him, he tried to come between my father and me, and now he’s learned what happens. Everything we had is ruined. North is going to prison, and I’m going somewhere just as bad.

My vision tunnels. My breathing becomes shallow. Anger flares inside me.

I *told* North, I *warned* him, my father isn't the kind of guy you fuck with. There are no depths he won't sink to for his own gain, and I should know, I've seen it. And North went and fucked with him anyway. Why didn't he just do as I told him? This is all his fault. Look what he's made my father do.

Now look what you've made me do.

The words echo in my head and I stop short, freezing mid-step on the pavement. Those are my father's words. Words I've heard a thousand times whenever my father went too far. Words that are etched into my bones. And now I'm directing them at North, the best person I've ever met. It's enough to make me feel sick.

What the fuck am I saying? I sound just like *him*.

Suddenly my legs feel weak, and I have to support myself against the brick wall of the police station. Why am I blaming North for this? All he did was react like any sane person would when faced with a man like my father. Am I really blaming him for defending himself and defending me?

I run my shaking hands through my damp hair.

My father has managed to control me my whole life, even when I'm on the other side of the country. He's sunk his claws in and left a stain on me that taints the way I act and the way I think. I always knew that, but now I realize just how deep it goes. He's twisted me so much that I'm blaming North for my father's shitty actions.

But it's my fault too. North was just doing what I should have done long ago. By not defending myself, I've forced North to do it for me, and now my father has hurt him too.

Now I have two options. I can roll over and give in to what feels inevitable like I have my whole life, or I can fucking do something about it. What would I do if it was anyone else but my father? I'd take him apart. So what's stopping me from doing that now, apart from the crippling fear?

I pull my phone out, dial with fumbling fingers, and hold my phone to my ear, listening to the ring tone.

Ten full rings go by. There's no way he doesn't have his phone on him, he keeps that thing glued to his hand at all times. He's letting me stew before he picks up, and it has the desired effect.

I remind myself that I'm doing this for North, and that gives me enough strength to keep going.

Finally, he answers, and I speak quickly before my nerve breaks.

“Where are you?” I say before he can speak. But when he replies he completely ignores my question.

“Have you got your stuff packed yet?” he asks.

I squeeze the phone, trying to keep my voice steady. “You got North arrested.”

There’s a pause. I can picture the irritation growing on his face. “He got himself arrested. The little prick attacked me out of nowhere.”

I don’t believe that for one second. “What did you do?”

His voice grows hot. “That’s enough, Malcolm,” he says sharply. “I’m coming to get you.”

That sudden sharp tone sends me reeling, my stomach flying and twisting. But this time there’s anger too. Anger that he can do this to me. And anger that he can do this to North.

I’ve secretly held the keys to my father’s power for some time, but I’ve never had the guts to use them, too afraid of what’s behind that door. But it’s not just me this time, and that’s enough to overcome my fear.

I know what I have to do, and, as much as the thought of seeing him face to face makes me want to throw up, I need to do it in person.

“I’ll be at the house,” I say, and hang up.

I’ve never hung up on my father before, and it sends a thrill of fear and unexpected exhilaration through me.

He calls back before I’ve even put my phone away, and I dismiss the call. He won’t like that. At all. I take a deep breath. There’s no going back now.

It’s time I face my father.

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By the time I get to the house his car is already in the driveway, parked diagonally and taking up most of the space. I pull up, fitting the Porsche in carefully next to it.

I feel oddly calm, although I know that underneath the thin veneer is a roiling storm I’ll have to face, but for the moment it’s held at bay by the sheer determination to do right by North. A compulsion I’ve never experienced before.

My father is in the kitchen waiting for me, just like he was six days ago. But unlike six days ago, he looks like he’s been in a brawl. His

nose is patched up with a white strip of gauze, his nostrils still crusted with blood. His left eye is swollen, the skin around it blooming into a dark rainbow of colors. And there's blood drops on the collar of his light blue shirt. He obviously hasn't had time to get changed yet.

It's a shock seeing him like this. I don't think I've ever seen him physically hurt before, he's always seemed so invincible. But now he looks like a real man, who can hurt and bleed.

North did that to him . . . for me. I don't know how that makes me feel, but it makes my heart thump hard in my chest.

He glares at me, the steely grey only visible in his one good eye.

"Why don't you have your shit packed up yet?" he barks. "I told you I was taking you home, now get upstairs—"

"And I told you I'm not leaving," I say.

His eyes darken, and his lips lift into a sneer. "How dare you talk back to me. That boy has turned you into a spoiled brat."

"So you decided to get him arrested?"

"I didn't do a thing. Your psychopathic boyfriend attacked me," he spits. "Luckily for him he caught me by surprise, otherwise he'd be in the fucking hospital right now instead of jail."

"If he attacked you, it's because you deserved it," I say.

His eyes widen a fraction before going even more narrow. "Excuse me?" The threat in his voice is enough to make my palms sweaty. I fist them.

"Drop the charges," I say.

He gives a sudden bark of cruel laughter, hard and sharp and cold. "I don't think so. He's going exactly where scum like him belongs. That little cock sucker thinks he can fuck with me? I was willing to be reasonable, but he's about to learn his lesson the hard way." A fleck of spit flies onto his lip. "Ha, he'll probably enjoy life in prison. I'm sure all of the other perverts in there will be only too thrilled to butt fuck a pretty boy like him. He's going away for a long fucking time."

"No, he isn't," I say. My whole body is shaking. "You're going to recant your story, you're going to pay his bail money, and you're going to do everything in your power to get any charges against him dropped."

He moves toward me, thunderous, ready to deal out retribution. "And why the fuck would I do that?"

"Because if you don't I'm going to let the authorities know about every single shady thing you've ever done."

He stops. His face freezes for a split second, the pause so small I could have blinked and missed it, but it was there. And it tells me exactly what I already knew. I've hit him where it hurts—his business. The thing that feeds into his ego and narcissism. He might not care about me, but his business is the son he never had. His true pride and joy. And if I want to fight back, that's where I need to attack.

"What the fuck are you talking about?" he says.

My father will stoop to any level to get what he wants, and that includes his business. In his eyes, the law is something weak people let themselves be constricted by. I've known about his activities since I was a kid, and I've hidden the fact, because even knowing would have been enough to ignite his rage. I've never once had the guts to do anything about it because I'm a fucking coward.

But now he's fucked with North—my beautiful, chaotic, dazzling, puppy dog, ball-of-sunshine boyfriend. And no one, *no one,* fucks with North but me. If my father taught me one thing, it's how to be a possessive asshole.

I stare him dead in the eye. "Do you remember when I was twelve and those guys came around, in the dark suits and shades? Because I do."

He blinks, standing perfectly still.

"Yeah." I nod. "You didn't think I saw them did you? You thought you'd locked me in my room, but guess what? I figured out how to get out of there a week after you had the locks installed. One thing you taught me, how not to get caught."

Finally, he speaks, shaking his head slowly. "You've lost your fucking mind."

"I was hiding at the top of the stairs, and I heard everything. It didn't make sense at the time, until I looked up some of the words you were using, and realized my father was a crook as well as an asshole."

"You watch the way you talk to me—" my father starts, but I can see the hesitation in his face.

"And then two years later, when those shareholders came over? I'm pretty sure the deal you made with them breaks at least three federal laws. And then there was your alibi for when all that money went missing," I say. "That always struck me as a bit of a lucky coincidence, considering you didn't have a property in the Cayman Islands at that time."

I keep my gaze steady on him, staring into his eyes, one steely grey, one swollen and red.

"I know all of it, Dad. The tax evasion. The blackmail. The bribes." I pause for effect. "And that's just the start. What about the prostitutes?"

His eyes widen. He opens his mouth but then closes it again and clenches his jaw.

"Did you really think I was that fucking stupid? You think you hit me enough to knock my brains out?" I swallow the venom in my throat. "I'll get the IRS, the DOJ, the FBI, fuck I'll get even the local sheriff on your ass so fast you won't know what's hit you."

He's still angry as all hell, but now he's weighing me up, too. I can see the cogs grinding in his head as he stares at me.

Then he says, "You don't have enough on me to make anything stick. Whatever you think you saw or heard, they won't take it seriously. You don't have any physical evidence."

"Don't I?" I jab back. "And even if I don't, I have enough to make the police investigate. These are serious crimes. And I don't think your business partners and investors will like the look of that very much. Especially if certain rumors get out."

His nostrils flare. The anger builds in his face, joined by a parade of different emotions. Incredulity, fear, frustration, rage.

It's almost mesmerizing to watch him flounder, but at the same time, his unpredictability sets off the alarm in my head telling me to find shelter. It takes everything in me to ignore it.

His face settles on bitter betrayal, mixed with hatred for his traitor of a son. "How could you threaten me like this? I have only ever tried to do what's best for you—"

I explode. "Don't give me that bullshit. You don't give a fuck what's best for me. You never have. You only care what's best for *you*."

"How dare you? I'm your father, I gave you *everything*."

"Apart from the one thing I actually needed. But you're going to give it to me now. You're going to drop the charges. You're going to fuck off and leave both of us alone. You're going to sign the deeds of the house over to me permanently. And you're going to keep on paying my tuition fees for Langley. You try to cut me off, or fuck with me or North in any way, and I'll bring your whole fucking empire down."

There's so much adrenaline fizzing through my body that I feel high.

This time my father's reaction is pure scorching rage. He pulls himself up, swelling, trying to intimidate me. And it works. For a second

I have to catch my breath. This is the part where I cower and cover my head with my arms, waiting for the blows to come, and my body is screaming at me to do it, and my will almost crumbles. But all those other times I was alone, and I'm not anymore.

I picture North standing next to me, with his shoulders back and his chin high. I recall North telling me he loves me, over and over again, reminding me that I am fucking worthy of it. Because North is smart and strong and fucking wonderful, and he wouldn't love me if I didn't deserve it.

I clear my mind, bring myself back to the present, and finally see my father for what he is—a middle aged man, shorter than me by a few inches, losing his shape. A pathetic bully who needs expensive suits and to make others feel small to make himself feel big.

He thunders toward me, pulling his arm back, and swings his fist at my head.

I catch it easily.

"You're never going to touch me again," I say.

His eyes go wide.

Then I twist his arm to the side, and punch him in the face, putting twelve years of retribution into it. He stumbles back, and falls against the kitchen counter, slips, and lands on the floor. Blood is oozing from his nose, and it looks like I've re-broken it for him. He cups his face in his hands and makes a pathetic whimpering sound.

"You should never have fucked with my boyfriend," I snarl. "Get him out. Now."

"Fuck," he hisses.

"Did you hear me?"

He glares up at me with watering eyes and says, dripping with venom, "Fine, but you keep your fucking mouth shut."

I allow myself a brief moment of relief before I nod and step to one side, creating a clear path for him.

"Now get the fuck out of here."

He manages to struggle up, cursing and using the counter for support, and staggers past me. I keep staring straight ahead at the spot where he crumpled to the floor, until the front door slams. Then all of the strength leaves my body and I sag down and catch myself on the countertop, shaking so hard I feel like I'm going to fall apart.

16

-Malcolm-

THE RADIO plays softly in the Porsche as I sit with the windows rolled down, watching the doors of the county jail. Behind me on the back seat sits a bulging paper grocery bag containing snacks, candy, a couple of bottles of soda, a fresh set of wrapped clothes, and a takeaway carton holding a burger with all the toppings and a side of fries.

I drum my fingers on the steering wheel. I've already been here for half an hour and the food's going to be cold by the time he makes an appearance, but knowing North, that isn't going to put him off.

Eventually, the doors open and North steps out into the sunlight, blinking. He's still wearing the clothes I last saw him in—a deep-green shirt and khakis—but they're in much worse condition than before. They're crumpled, and his shirt is stained with flecks of dried blood. I panic for a moment before I realize it's probably my father's blood, not his.

He appears unscathed, but his face is creased, like he slept face down on a grill all night, and his blond hair is a riotous mess.

He stands just outside the doors, scanning the parking lot, and his blue eyes light up when he sees me, and he smiles. I smile back at him.

But his relief morphs into confusion as he trots over to the car, the pallid sun beating down on his wide shoulders, and leans into the driver's side window.

"Oh my god, you're still here. I was so worried, I thought you'd be —"

I grab the front of his shirt, yank him down toward me through the window, and kiss him hard, digging my other hand into his hair. He smells fusty, like stale sweat, and they obviously haven't let him brush his teeth, but I keep on kissing him like a starving man until I need to stop to breathe.

I let go of him and he blinks like he's been dazzled. "Are you ok?" I ask, my voice coming out urgently.

"I'm, uh, fine," he says, dazed, shaking his head. He goes around to the passenger side and climbs in, closing the door behind him. I cannot explain the relief I feel at having him close to me again. "A bit tired and hungry. And my hands hurt like fuck."

He flexes them in his lap and I look down. They're busted, bruised, and crusted with blood. I think about my father's face, and I can't help but smile. Carefully, I reach down and take his hands in mine, bring them to my mouth and kiss each busted knuckle.

"I'll get you bandaged up at home," I say.

When I look up, his face is flushed a deep pink and he's staring at me like he's seen a ghost.

"What?" I ask.

"Nothing, it's just . . . that was really . . . sweet," he stammers. "Are you ok?"

It's true, that isn't a gesture I'd normally make, but I'm feeling particularly sentimental right now.

"Don't get used to it," I grunt.

He shakes his head and seems to come back to himself. "What happened? Where's your dad? I was so worried he'd make you leave while I was in there."

I have a lot to tell him, but I don't have the energy to explain everything. I'll get around to that later. Right now, I'm just happy that he's back.

"I'm fine, and he's gone. He won't be bothering us again," I summarize.

North frowns. "How? Why? What happened?"

I take his chin in my hand. His stubble is longer than normal, rough under my fingers. "He fucked with you. And no one fucks with you."

He grins slowly. "Yeah. That's your job."

It's like our minds are linked.

"Exactly." I let go of his jaw. "But the important thing is he's gone. He paid your bail money, he's going to get all charges dropped with his fancy lawyers, and he's going to refinance my Langley tuition."

"How the hell did you convince him to do all that?" North narrows his eyes. "You didn't kill him did you? I don't mind, but I need to prepare myself if I'm going to get involved in covering up a murder."

I laugh and he gives a wicked grin. I have to say, I'm liking this dark side of him.

"So, I hear you gave him a royal beat down?"

North's grin fades. "Yeah, I'm sorry. I know you didn't want me to do anything, and I tried so freaking hard, but . . . I just couldn't."

I have no doubt that my father brought it entirely on himself. Only *he* would have the ability to make the friendliest guy in Langley swing at him. "What did he do?"

He pulls a face, like he isn't sure he wants to tell me, and I frown. How bad can it be?

"He offered me money to . . . to leave you."

I blink. "Oh."

For some reason it shocks me more than it should. I know he's an asshole, I know he's an abusive jerk, I know all he cares about is himself, but it still stings. North is the only good thing I have in my life, and my father wanted to take him away from me.

North leans back into his seat with a tired sigh. "He asked how much it would take for me to dump you. And I just lost it."

I watch him for a moment. I know money is hard for his family, and my father would have spent any amount to make his problems go away. North could have really helped himself and his folks out with all that cash. Did the thought cross his mind to take the offer, if even for only a split second? I scratch behind my ear.

As if that catches his attention, he looks up and gazes back at me, then says sharply, "Hey, if you're wondering whether I would even consider taking the money, you're going to be in a whole heap of shit."

Can he really read me that easily? I need to work on my poker face, obviously.

I shrug.

"I would never ever do something like that. I'm not going anywhere, not even if someone offers me a mansion in the Hollywood Hills and a lifetime supply of blow jobs. You're more important to me than any money or flashy lifestyle."

"Thanks," I say. And I guess I actually do believe him.

North sighs and flops back into his chair again. For the first time, I notice he's holding a little clear baggy with his phone, wallet, and discreet collar in it. It irks me that they took it off him.

"So now what?" he asks.

"Well, first," I say, "you're going to put your collar back on."

“Yes, sir.” He gives me a little eyebrow waggle and tips the bag out into his lap. He wraps the collar around his neck, and I help him fasten it together, skimming my fingers over his skin. Even after a night in the cells it’s still warm and smells delicious. Slightly sweaty, slightly musty. I want to lick him.

He powers his phone on as I start the car and the screen fills with a stream of messages and missed calls.

“Geez, are these all from you?” he asks, scrolling through them.

“I was worried,” I say.

“About little old me?”

I roll my eyes and pull out of the parking lot slowly. Then I remember the bag of groceries, reach over, and plop it onto his lap. His eyes light up when he sees the takeaway cartons.

“Ooooh, tasties for me?”

“I know how to treat you right.”

He opens the carton, grabs the burger out, and stuffs half of it into his mouth. His eyes roll up and he flops his head onto the headrest and groans obscenely. You’d think he hadn’t eaten in a week.

“Oh, yes. Fuck me, I love you,” he says to the burger, then looks at me and adds around a mouthful of food. “I was talking to the burger by the way.”

“Clearly,” I say.

He takes another huge mouthful, almost finishing the thing off in two bites.

As I pull out into traffic, a song I like comes on and I turn the radio up. The sunshine warms my face.

“So, what was it like?” I ask.

“Jail?” North grunts around his food.

“Beating up my father.”

He pauses, rummaging through the snacks, and grins at me. “So fucking good.”

“I have to admit, I’m a little jealous. Although I did get one good hit in before he left.” I pop my fist for emphasis.

“You did? Nice.” He holds his hand up for a high five and I slap it.

“You know, out of the two of us, I’m really surprised it was you that got arrested for assault. I didn’t see that one coming.”

“I’m a badass,” North laughs.

“You are.”

I take my eyes off the road just long enough to kiss him again.

17

-North-

IT'S BEEN a week since Mal's dad left, a week since I busted out of jail—ok I didn't bust out of jail, but that sounds cooler than "had my bail paid by a jerkwad"—and a week since Mal blackmailed his dad like a badass. We haven't heard anything from him, and it looks like all the charges against me have been dropped somehow, even though it happened in front of a whole food court full of people. I guess you can get away with anything if you have the best lawyers in the state. Mal's college fees are being paid again, and everything is back to exactly how it was before.

Well, not exactly the same. Some things have changed, but they're things that needed to change. Although that doesn't make them any easier.

I lounge on the couch replying to messages on my phone while Mal sits next to me with my legs in his lap, flicking backward and forward through a book that he's obviously not reading.

"Enjoying that?"

He grunts noncommittally. He's been fidgety all day, stiff and prickly, and it reminds me of something that I can't quite put my finger on. He won't admit what's making him nervous, but I already know why.

"Do you want me to come with you later?" I say, not looking up from my phone and trying to keep my tone casual. Mal is a complicated beast. If you want to offer him help, you need to be sneaky. I've almost got the technique perfected, but he can still be stubborn sometimes. Today seems like one of those days.

Mal frowns at the book he's not reading. "I'm a big boy. I can go without having my hand held," he grumbles.

A hedgehog! That's it. He reminds me of a hedgehog today. A grumpy, spikey hedgehog who won't admit he needs support. I cover

my mouth with my hand and try to pretend I'm smiling at something on my phone.

Despite my amusement I know today is a damn big step for him, and anyone in his shoes would be nervous. I want to make it easier for him however I can, without triggering his need to be entirely independent. If I can frame this like he's doing me a favor instead of the other way around, it might work.

"I know you don't," I say, putting a whine in my voice. "But I'm bored. I want to get out of the house."

"What are you, a dog? You've been out of the house all day."

That's true. Mal had all of my stuff moved from my dorm today and we decided to keep out of the way. I convinced him to go to the movies with me for a mini date and it turned into a full day of just hanging out and having a nice time.

I thought he'd have my things moved into one of the spare rooms, but when we got back I saw that it was all neatly unpacked in his own bedroom. Space had been made in the closet for my clothes, my books were stacked by the desk, my alarm clock and phone charger were plugged in on the nightstand. I got a little emotional, but can you blame me?

After I recovered from that, I noticed another new addition to the room—a big mirror set on wheels, tucked into a corner. The sly grin Mal gave me had my heart racing. And it was only fair that we had to give it a test run.

I can confirm it's a good mirror. Very reflective.

I shift on the couch, enjoying the way my muscles ache. "But you know what I'm like, I need constant entertainment. I can come on the car ride and hang out in the waiting room. Read the magazines. Flirt with the receptionist."

Mal sighs and rolls his eyes, but there's a tiny hint of relief in it. "Fine, you can fucking come if you want to so badly." He narrows his eyes. "But if I do catch you flirting with the receptionist I'll have to punish you."

"Don't tempt me," I say. "I was only kidding, but now I might actually do it."

He growls, a rumble in his chest. "Keeping you in line is impossible when you're such a fucking masochist."

I wink at him. "That's why we get on so well."

We stay there until it's time to go. He's silent on the drive into town, so I fill the tension with inane chatter to try to put him at ease until we reach our destination—a tall, red-brick building with dark-green doors and a sign that reads *"North Park Counseling and Therapy".*

When he doesn't get out of the car, I put my hand on his forearm.

"All right?"

"Yeah," he says.

He walks stiffly into the building, we find the waiting room, and he sits on one of the chairs, looking too big for the small seat. He stands out in the lush green room, his outfit all black against the potted plants dotted around the place.

The appointment isn't until five-thirty, and we arrived early in true Malcolm form, so we still have a while to wait. His leg jiggles as he taps his heel on the floor in a nervous staccato rhythm and turns at every sound like he's expecting someone to jump out at him.

After about ten minutes, a kind-looking older woman opens the door at the far end of the room.

"Malcolm Blackwood?"

He all but leaps out of his chair, and she offers him a gentle smile before leading the way back through the doorway. Mal follows her like a man walking to his execution. At the last moment, he looks back at me over his shoulder, his eyes wide, and I give him two big thumbs up, before the door closes and he's gone.

***

"Careful, don't push too hard," Mal says, as we jog back and forth, tapping the ground at each end of the field before turning back and going the other direction.

Tap, run, tap, run.

The night air is cold and our breaths plume up in front of us with each exhale. It's really starting to get chilly. Winter break is coming up and there's a buzz of excitement in the air, for me at least. Mal doesn't seem too keen.

I love this time of year. The holidays around Christmas are everything that I love—family, friends, and food. But this year it's going to be even better, because Mal has agreed to come meet my parents and stay for the whole winter break.

I cannot wait to make him wear a paper crown and a Nanny Nolan special Christmas sweater. Using my very sneaky skills and a tape measure, I've already given her Mal's measurements and she's knitting it up right now. I've requested a jaunty pattern that includes little cowboy hats, and I can't fucking wait to see his face. I smile secretly to myself.

He's going to hate it so, so much, but I'll make it up to him with the special gift I have already wrapped and hidden in the back of the closet. He's going to love that one.

"Keep it easy, you need to be loose for the game," Mal says, oblivious to my scheming.

We keep pace with each other, matching our long, easy strides side by side.

It's so funny being here with him on the field at night. I think back to all that time ago, when I was sure he hated me and I felt strangely drawn to him. At the time I thought it was because I needed him to like me, because I had some kind of pathological need to be loved by all. But now I realize I was just insanely attracted to him. Fear and lust can feel confusingly similar.

"Remember when I caught you jerking off on the field that night?" I say.

Mal almost chokes, sending a plume of steam into the night air. "I wasn't jerking off."

"Yes you were. I saw your cock. You were going at it like there was no tomorrow. I thought you were going to pull it clean off."

We reach the end, tap the line, and change direction.

"I had a thigh cramp," Mal says indignantly.

"Bullshit. I can prove it, I've still got the video somewhere."

He scoffs. "And what's your excuse for being a perv?"

"Hey, you were in the middle of a field, you weren't exactly keeping it private."

"That doesn't mean you can hide and watch, and record me."

"All right I don't have an excuse. It was hot," I say, giving him a sly grin. "You know what?"

"What?"

"I totally still jerk off to that video."

"You little shit," he snarls and suddenly lunges for me. I speed up to avoid him with a yelp, and he chases me down, tackles me around the waist, and throws me to the ground.

“Fuck,” I shout, laughing.

I roll over on the damp turf and he wrestles me, trying to pin me with his body.

“You dirty pervert,” he snarls.

Somehow I manage to get on top and then I’m kissing him hard as our bodies slide together. He kisses me back, and then grabs my shoulders and flips me again so he’s on top. He pins my arms above my head, transfers my wrists to one hand, and starts to tug at my sweatpants.

I break the kiss. “Hey!”

“You’ve brought this on yourself,” he growls, and pulls them down enough to expose my dick. The air is biting cold against my flesh and I hiss through my teeth, but he crushes his lips against mine again, cutting off any protest as our teeth clash together.

He pulls away just long enough to pull a packet of lube out of his sweatpants pocket and tear it open with his teeth.

“Why the hell do you have lube with you?” I gasp.

“I never know when I’ll need it,” he says as he gets his own cock out and presses it against mine, warm flesh on flesh. His hand wraps around both of us and slides up and down, stroking us together. I make a tight sound into his mouth and move my hips in time. His palm tugs roughly against my skin, with not quite enough lube to make it entirely smooth, and I relish the painful friction. It matches the dangerous tempo of my pulse.

As he works us in tandem, his mouth slides from mine, and trails across my jaw to my ear. He bites down on the lobe, hard, and then moves down my throat. He takes some time there, sucking over the marks that never quite fade and bringing them back to full life.

Once he’s finished he tugs my top up with his teeth and sucks on one nipple until it’s stiff, before moving to the other. The cold air stings where his mouth leaves my skin wet.

He comes first, and uses his cum to lube my cock more, making it slippery and oh-so fucking good.

I come, my hips jacking up into his hand, and he collapses onto me, our chests heaving together.

He fumbles our cocks away and wipes his hand on the grass by my head.

“Now we’re even.”

The cold air fills my lungs. “Wow,” I say. “I can see why you liked it.”

He snorts. “Let’s just hope there are no other voyeurs hiding in the bleachers.”

“Ah, who cares. It’s not like we’re a secret anymore.”

“Look how far you’ve come,” he says wryly.

“All thanks to you sensei.”

“You’re such an idiot,” he says and burrows his head into my neck. Looks like we’re staying here for a while. I don’t mind though. The air is cold, but Mal’s body is warm, and the afterglow is bathing me in a comfortable haze. I close my eyes and run my fingers through his hair.

“How was therapy?” I ask.

When he came out of the therapist’s room he looked completely worn out, so I didn’t want to push it at the time.

There’s a sizable pause before he says, “It was hard. But . . . I think it was good. Thanks for making me go, I guess.”

“I’m here for you if you want to talk about it,” I say.

He nods, then goes on stiffly, “There is something I’ve been wanting to say to you. For a while . . .” He trails off, struggling for words. His body has tensed slightly against mine, and I think I know where this is going.

“You don’t have to say it,” I say quietly.

“I want to,” Mal says against the curve of my neck. He clears his throat, working up to it. Then says the words I’ve been privately hoping to hear. “I love you.”

I bite down on my lip, trying not to overreact. Trying to play it cool for him, like it’s not a huge fucking deal.

“I love you too,” I say.

His body relaxes again, and I feel his lips move against my skin as they stretch into the big, stupid-fucking-goofy smile that is entirely his and no one else’s. The smile that I would burn the whole world down for. “All right, don’t get fucking mushy.”

EPILOGUE

-North-

WE'RE FIVE points behind on the last down and we're in possession of the ball. The floodlights illuminate the field, and above, the stars wink in the wintry night sky.

I twist my feet into the turf, crouched behind the quarterback. The ball is coming to me, and I'm ready for it. I've got my team around me, and my sights set on the end zone. Mal is to my right, hunkered low, the uniform stretched across his sturdy back. I allow myself a moment to enjoy the view of his ass in the skintight pants. Damn. How anyone can keep their head in the game with that tight ass on the field is a miracle.

Concentrate, North. Football now, ass later.

I drag my eyes away moments before the play starts. The quarterback snaps the ball back and it slots into my arms like it's a missing part of me. The lines smash ahead, and I set off, aiming wide, pushing with everything I've got.

As I pass the clash of bodies, a defender comes at me, arms stretched out to take me down, and a second later, Mal slams into him from the side and they fall in a tumble of limbs and pads. I jump clear and sprint, eating the field up as my legs pump.

A few more defenders lunge for me but they fall by the wayside as I spin past. No one and nothing can stop me now.

I sail into the end zone, scoring the final touchdown. The crowd erupts as I throw the ball down where it rebounds off the turf and do a running flip as the buzzer goes. The guys rush me with back slaps, high fives, punches, and shoulder shakes, as they murder the song.

"North to Alaska, go north the rush is on."

Through their bodies I scan the field for Mal, and spot him where he always is, hovering just outside the group. As I wade through the bodies I see Randy break off and run to the stands, where Becki is

waiting with a “GO GREEN HAWKS” sign. He sweeps her off her feet as she whoops.

I run full speed at Mal and throw my arms around him.

“Whoa,” he says, and stumbles, almost tipping over before he returns the embrace. “Good job, Nolan.”

We pry our helmets off, throw them down, and kiss hard and fierce as the crowd cheers.

WHAT NEXT?

IF YOU ENJOYED this omnibus edition of the ***My Dark Jock*** series, please leave me a rating, review, or shout at me on social media. As as indie author it makes a huge difference.

Here are the places you can find me:

Goodreads
Amazon
Instagram
Facebook

If you want to keep up to date with new releases you can do so by joining my Newsletter. And you'll also get a free spicy BDSM short too!

Do you enjoy **Dark MM smut?** Check out my ***Dangerous Seductions*** series HERE. (TW for N*con/Dubcon)

I also write **MM Sci-Fi Romance** under the name Arden Fox. You can check out my ***Coveted Bonds*** series HERE.

THANK YOU

I JUST WANT to say a huge thank you to everyone who has read, rated, reviewed, beta'd, edited, dm'd, liked, commented, reposted, and recommended. I couldn't have done this without you. Thank you for giving my book a chance and loving these two boys as much as me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ARDEN LONG IS a small scruffy creature that lives in the British countryside and can often be found in a pile of blankets eating snacks with their furry companion Tessy Cat. When they're not writing, they're reading everything from fantasy, to crime thrillers, to romance. They enjoy writing queer stories that include spice, dark themes, and toxic people who are far too lovable.

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